











# SELLBRIDGE & CO.

AN AUSTRALIAN STORY.

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BY

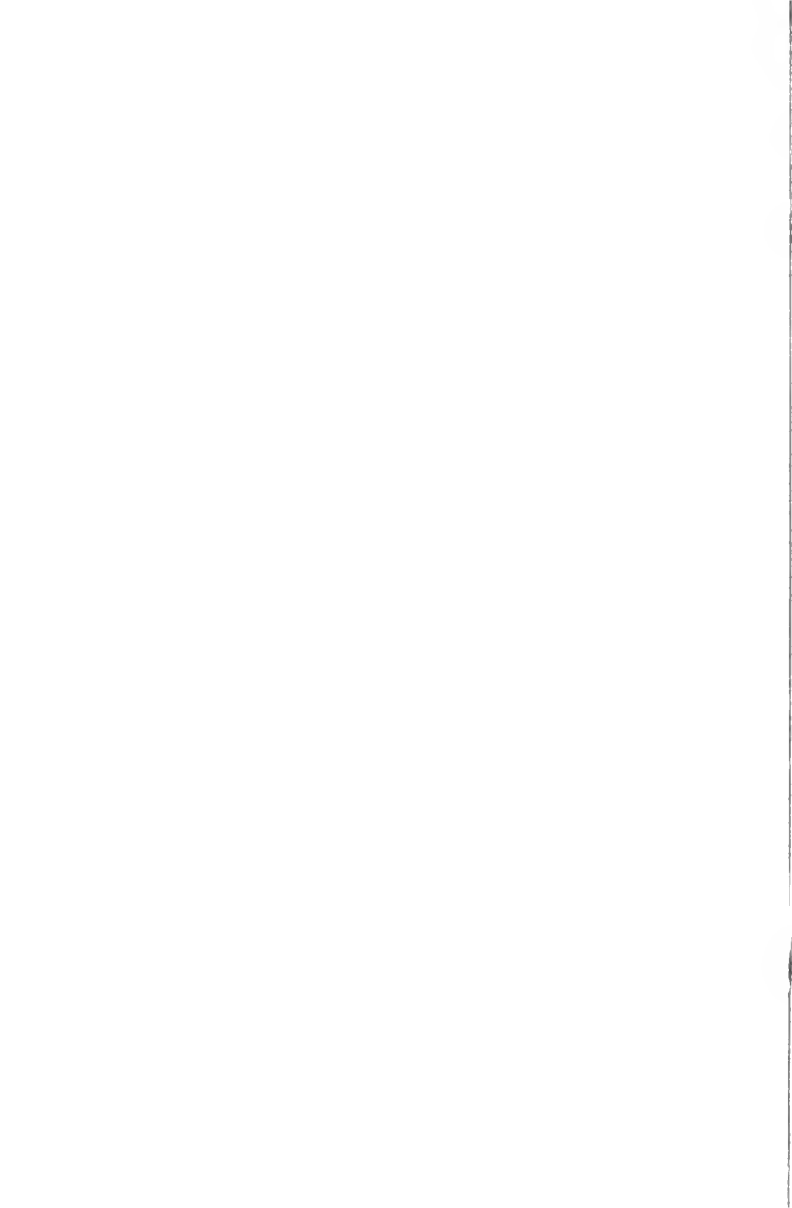
JOYCE VINCENT.

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# SELLBRIDGE & CO.

## CHAPTER I.

“The North Wind doth blow,  
And we shall have snow.”

Runs the harmless rhyme of our childhood, and in it there is, apparently, nothing to disturb even the most ill-regulated temper. But, nevertheless, it does cause slight irritation, should it recur to the mind of a perspiring individual suffering the torments of an Australian North Wind, which suggests burning mountains, lava lakes, or fiery furnaces—but not snow. To the inhabitants of the foggy fifties, the North Wind brings cold; but it also conveys a bracing influence from the icy fields of its birth, scatters the Gulf Stream mists, clears the air of impurities; and, though it bears away old or feeble lives on its icy pinions, yet leaves the

strong growths all the stronger for its visit. Not so the Australian North Wind ; for, arising in sun-baked plains within the Tropic of Capricorn, it sweeps South over mile on mile of heated country, taking up clouds of dust as it goes, and finally falls on the settled districts like a blast from Lucifer's furnace. Heated, attenuated, devoid of the due proportion of oxygen, and laden with fine particles of dust, it withers as it goes, and deprives the human victim of energy, till he almost finds it a trouble to live, as the unoxygenated blood flows sluggishly through his veins, and his laboring heart throbs heavily.

The Italians are well aware of the depressing effect of the hot wind which blows over from the Desert of Sahara, and they say of any gloomy literary work : "*Ghieu ! era scritto in tempo del Sirocco*" ("Fie ! it was written in the time of the Sirocco.") But this hot wind is, to some extent, tempered by passing over a comparatively high mountain range and the Mediterranean Sea, whereas the Australian "Brickfielder" is but slightly cooled in its passage from the tropics, and therefore surpasses the Sirocco in depressing qualities. Well does the Australian know long before he rises in the morning that a North Wind is blowing, for rest has gone from him, and all his troubles, physical and mental, seem to have become accentuated, though he felt well and cheerful when he retired on the previous night.



In all natural (apparent) evils there is some good if it can only be traced, and the "Brickfielder" proves no exception to the rule, for it acts as an atmospheric scavenger, dessicating the bacilli which otherwise would flourish too abundantly in the comparatively humid regions of the South. A bacillus of the most robust constitution cannot retain its activity through a three-days' "Brickfielder," which is, really, not surprising, seeing that much more powerful organisations can scarcely do so, and, therefore, the philosophic Australian accepts the North Wind as an unpleasant friend, and struggles through it with the aid of cool blinds and stimulants.

Being an Englishman, and not yet accustomed to the climate, Mr. Staunton scarcely felt equal to living, as on the third day of a North Wind he lay limp and exhausted on the dining-room sofa of Mrs. William's "select boarding house for gentlemen," which was situated in a suburb of Stanley, a town in Victoria.

Almost every Australian town possesses suburbs, even if the main street is formed of a store, pub., and a blacksmith's shop, and very proud the inhabitants are of these adjuncts to their city. Some years ago, when Bendigo was Sandhurst, a visitor to that golden city was asked by a stout lady of Irish extraction if he had seen the town. He replied shortly in the affirmative, and disappointed, no doubt, because he did not express the surprise at its magnitude and beauty which

all Bendigonians expect, she exclaimed, "Och ! the town is nothin'. Wait till you see the superbbs !"

The "superbbs" of Stanley were very extensive, and straggled off from the town in all directions, till, in one or two instances, they were lost in the bush, which had not yet been completely cleared away. They gave the place the appearance of a large city when viewed from the summit of the Town Hall tower—"one hundred and sixteen feet, eight inches, and three-quarters from foundation to apex ; eight hundred and twenty-seven feet above sea level," as the Town Clerk explained to each visitor—and strangers, who from that point could not detect the numerous gaps in the lines of houses, had been known to say, "I had no idea the place was so large," and to greet the Mayor, who generally accompanied them to the summit, with an air of increased respect very gratifying to that modest dignitary. Though the town straggled and threw out immensely long branches, these were all straight, having been, like the streets of all Australian cities (except Sydney), laid in a surveyor's office before a dozen houses had been built. The houses, though flimsily made of wood, with roofs of galvanised iron or shingle, and of an irregularity in size and shape simply indiscribable, were, as a rule, cleanly and home-like, with their brightly painted doors, neatly curtained windows, and small flower-beds at the front and sides. There was nothing even suggestive of a

slum in the town, and the most super-refined person might have gone from one end to the other without seeing or hearing anything offensive, and day or night man or woman could pass through the meanest street in absolute safety, and without fear of insult.

And now to return to the domicile of Mrs. Williams, where Mr. Staunton has been left too long reclining on the sofa. The house was a large, two-storey dwelling of the inevitable material—wood (which, however, was carved and painted in fair taste), and with its white walls and bright green blinds, did not seem ill-adapted to a clime where the sun shines on almost every day of the year. The garden was large and tolerably well-kept, though just now, in consequence of the hot winds, the flowers were drooping and the grasses appeared dry and withered.

If the exterior of the house fairly suited the climate, however, the same could not be said of the interior, for it was painted, papered, and furnished after the best model known to Mrs. Williams, namely, a mansion in Bloomsbury, wherein her mother had once kept boarders. The red or dark-toned papers, reminiscent of large fires and an outside temperature four degrees below freezing point, the heavy curtains, stuffy carpets, and baize table-covers, the straight-backed hard-seated, shiny chairs, and the inevitable horse-hair sofa, were all there, and though Mrs. Williams had left England when a mere girl, and had been

forty years in Australia, yet was the trail of Bloomsbury over the whole interior, and *menage* also ; and one who, like Mr. Staunton, had lived for awhile in that celebrated lodging-house quarter, recognised something terribly familiar in the air of Mrs. Williams' place the very first day he entered it. The leathery steak, with its gravy of surprising greasiness, the too-frequent chop, the flabby ham, the underdone egg of doubtful soundness, the half-boiled cabbage, the mysterious hash—all, all had, alas ! crossed the line, and were causing dyspepsia in the Southern, as they had in the Northern Hemisphere.

When Mr. Staunton recognised these old familiar evils, he thought of "leaving at once instead of in the morning," as the old pantomime gag had it, but the cleanliness and order of the house pleased him, and he stayed on, and he is now reclining on the sofa, as was mentioned<sup>3</sup> once or twice previously. To him, as he lies gasping—the temperature of the room being 104 degrees—enters Mrs. Williams' only unmarried daughter and chief assistant. This fair "Australian Native," as she was wont to term herself, was tall, and perhaps a little angular, but she carried herself with a certain swing that was not ungraceful, and gave the beholder an impression that she possessed a fair amount of independence. Miss Williams has a communication trembling on her lips as she approaches the recumbent Staunton, whose muscles are so relaxed

that even his pipe has fallen from his jaws, and lies on the floor.

"Ow! Mr. Staunton, the kyiew has run dry," exclaimed Miss Williams; "and——"

"The what has run dry?"

"The kyiew."

"You mean the cow, I suppose?"

"I said that. And mother wants to know if you will take condensed milk in your tea, for she has no one to send daan taan for fresh."

"I am not surprised to learn that the singularly-named quadruped has run dry in weather like this. And so far as I am concerned, I have no objection to condensed milk, but I can't answer for Ryan. He is rather fastidious, you know, Miss Williams."

"Is he, really? I'd have thought a quiet man like him wouldn't mind a bit what he got."

"There you are mistaken; these quiet fellows are always troublesome, particularly in connection with their food. I knew a sad case that arose from this very cause."

"Ow! did you, Mr. Staunton?" said Miss Williams, interested.

"Yes; a young fellow married a nice girl—one who *looked* nice, you know, but wasn't strong in house-keeping. He was a quiet, studious sort of chap, always reading and all that, and she took no trouble about the food, but gave him chops—the only thing

she knew how to cook—every day for a month. He took anything that was given to him at first, but in the end his digestion broke down, and his temper got bad, and he asked for something else. She took no notice, however, and went on giving him chops; so one day he burnt her best boots, and told her he would burn something else each time chops appeared on the table. She fought against her weakness for a month or so after that; but then, in a fit of absent-mindedness, she gave him chops again, and this time he burnt her hat. She took this very much to heart, as the hat became her, and for a fortnight she fed him on tinned lobster and pressed beef, which made him very bilious and cross, and hastened the end. It came one day when in a paroxysm of irritation, brought on by brooding over her hat, she cooked chops again, and then he tore round the house raving, and burnt her parasol, two pairs of silk stockings, and her new jacket. This last outrage drove her wild, and she threw a tin of lobster at him, whereupon he retaliated by knocking her almost senseless with a chop. To save the rest of her clothes she ran away to her mother's, and never came back. The affair caused much ill-feeling and scandal, for she accused him of torturing her by burning, and he retorted by stating that she endeavored to chop him to death, and they hated one another ever after. So take warning by this, Miss Williams, and beware of quiet men."

"Ow! Mr. Staunton, I do believe you're joking," said Miss Williams, who had been regarding him with a look of surprise and horror blended, while he told this tale.

"No; it is quite true, I assure you. Where is Mr. Ryan?"

"In the garden, getting gripes."

"What?"

"Picking gripes; there are a few ripe, you know."

"Oh! Well, I will go to him and explain what the North Wind has done for the kyiew." And rising to his feet with an effort, he went outside, where he was pleased to find the air becoming cooler.

Frank Staunton was a good humoured and pleasant-looking young fellow of twenty-five, with tolerably regular features, a fresh complexion, and well-knit figure. His smooth, unlined features did not create the impression of one whom trouble much oppressed as a rule, but nevertheless care weighed rather heavily upon his mind just at present. In the main walk of the garden he found the individual he was seeking, a dark and rather saturnine-looking man, who was apparently some five or six years older than himself.

"I did not know that you were here, Ryan, till Miss Williams told me," said Staunton as he came up, "or I should have come out before. I have had no manner of luck to-day, and am baked, choked with dust, depressed, and disgusted."

“How did you get on with Perkins.”

“I took your letter, sent it in by a clerk, and asked to see Mr. Perkins, but was told that he was engaged. I called again an hour later, and this time was informed that he was out, but had left a verbal message for me to the effect that he ‘could not assist Mr. Ryan or Mr. Staunton in the matter mentioned.’ ”

“Hum !” was all Ryan said.

“Well, then I determined to try someone on my own account, and went to Forrester, the manager of the Central Bank—you know I have been very intimate with the Forresters ever since I first came here ; dined there twice a week, sang songs with the girls, listened to Mrs. Forrester while she reeled off half-a-mile of Stanley gossip, and all the rest of it. Well, that being so, I expected at least a friendly and encouraging reception, but met with something very different.” Ryan, who had been looking away, now turned and regarded Staunton curiously as the latter went on, “Judge my surprise when I was most coldly received by Forrester, who told me that he could offer me no assistance, and advised me to clear out to Melbourne.”

“Ha !” exclaimed Ryan.

“Don’t you think it peculiar ? ” asked Staunton.

“Well, no. I did at first, but believe I see something pretty clearly now. I had a try, too, this afternoon, and saw Smith, Jameson, Burns, and Thomson, of the Land Mortgage Co., and in each case the answer



was the same ; they knew nothing likely to suit me."

"And now what do you make of all this?"

"That the whole thing has been pre-arranged, and some person strongly interested and possessing influence is endeavouring to prevent us from obtaining employment which will keep us in Stanley," said Ryan.

"I cannot believe that," said Staunton, incredulously. "Who would think us of sufficient importance to care whether we remained here or not? We are not worth three hundred pounds between us, and possess about as much influence as Mrs. Williams' cow."

"We are apparently of no importance; but someone evidently thinks that we would be as well out of the way, and I have formed my opinion from the similarity of our case to others. You have been here for some years, and must remember Young?"

"Yes, I remember him. He came to Sellbridge & Co. with a letter of introduction from Harry Sellbridge—as I did—and was rather suddenly dismissed—as I have been."

"Just so. And what happened to him after that?"

"Well, I believe he could not find work here, and had to go to Melbourne."

"Now, what was Jardine's fate?"

"Just the same, I believe. Only he was here long before my time, and I don't know where he came from."

"Then there was Sullivan. He fared similarly, did he not?"

“ I believe so, now that you mention it.”

“ And to go further, do you know of a single ex-employee who is still in this town ?”

“ Really, I do not ; and it is a singular fact, though it never occurred to me before. But what are you driving at, Ryan ?”

“ I am not prepared to say just now. But if, after trying the few likely people remaining, I meet with the same fortune as has been ours this last month, I will tell you what I suspect, and will, moreover, make a suggestion—— But there is Miss Williams, who says that ‘ tea is witing.’ ‘ Coming, Miss Williams, it shan’t wite for us,’ ” and the two men walked up the path to the house.

Staunton was a young Englishman in whom, during youth and early manhood, matter, in the form of muscle, had undoubtedly dominated mind. Possessing a big heart and expansive lungs, his blood had bounded through his veins—clear, red and pure, a veritable “ wine of life,” which had imparted to all his circumstances a tinge of its own roseate hue.

To Frank Staunton, books, save those that dealt with fighting and adventure, were an utter bore, while the confinement of school was to him intolerably irksome. He hated ten o’clock in the morning, and loved three in the afternoon ; was a snail at the former hour and a hare at the latter, when he generally emerged into the street like “ Pussey from her form,” and tore off to the

play-field at the head of a howling mob of delighted youngsters.

His parents, who lived in a small country town, were in anything but affluent circumstances, but, notwithstanding, Frank managed to share in most amusements that were going.

In the intervals of the serious business of his life, he managed to pick up a smattering of knowledge, principally in the matter of figures, for which he early exhibited some aptitude. This led to his being elected treasurer to several sports clubs, whose previous officials had been driven almost crazy by their efforts to make the cash balance—members having a weakness for paying their subscriptions in the field, at club dinners, and such inconvenient places and seasons. He also became a fluent writer, from much practice in corresponding with other clubs, writing reports of cricket matches for the local papers, and so on. He was designed for the law, but got no further than a brief experience as clerk to a firm of solicitors in Chancery Lane, and such very slight legal knowledge as was to be obtained in the position of book-keeper and corresponding clerk to a firm of local solicitors with whom his father had some interest. It was his connection with sport that after all gave him his first opportunity of taking part in the real game of life. At a cricket match he met a young Australian with whom he became tolerably friendly, and who, after further

meetings, explained that he was owner of a prosperous business, in which an opening could be found for Staunton, if the latter was prepared to emigrate. He was more than willing, as his prospects in life had at length begun to cause him great anxiety, and his father's patience was quite exhausted. After the necessary preparation, he left England for Melbourne, and from that city proceeded at once to Stanley, where he presented to Mr. Whitegate, the manager of Sellbridge & Co., a letter of introduction from Mr. Harry Sellbridge, and in accordance with its instructions was a few days later notified that employment would be given to him at a fair salary. All the way out from England he had been preparing himself for hard work on arrival, and now entered his duties with such readiness and determination, that in a week or two he had won the approval of Mr. Whitegate, who one day said to him, "I am pleased with your zeal and carefulness, and hope to be able to find something better for you before long." He expressed his thanks for this; but the manager declared that he had pleasure in making the promise, feeling that Mr. Staunton deserved advancement. "You can tell Mr. Sellbridge," he went on, "when you write to him—you occasionally drop him a line, no doubt?"

"Well, no," replied Staunton. "I have not a very intimate acquaintance with Mr. Sellbridge, and we do not correspond regularly, though I have written thank-

ing him for his kindness in giving me a letter to you, and mentioning that you had almost immediately found employment for me."

"Well, I was about to say that when next you write, you can inform him that I am highly pleased to have your services, which I find very useful, and that I intend to find you something better, soon."

This was very satisfactory to Staunton, and he believed himself in a fair way to prosper, especially when, some months later, Mr. Whitegate made good his promise, and he was promoted to the position of accountant—vice Young, before mentioned—and given a good salary.

There is generally a fly in the ointment, however, and the troublesome insect in Staunton's unguent proved to be Munks, the assistant manager.

Munks, who was a burley, coarse-grained man, with a loud voice and shakiness in his aspirates, did not, from the first, appear to take to Staunton, who was, he said, "A paper collar chap," which was his way of describing a man who spoke correct English, and wore well-fitting clothes. Staunton soon began to observe that the assistant manager's eye was constantly upon him, with no very kindly expression in its bilious depths, and that when he sometimes came in with a flower in his button-hole, or gloves on his hands, Munks would sniff, and by banging about the books, or bullying the clerks, exhibit signs of being dis-

pleased about something. If Staunton happened to be a little late, Munks would remark "That clock seems to be a bit fast, this morning," whereupon, every watch in the office would be consulted, the clock found to be right, and attention drawn to Staunton's lateness in arriving.

After the latter had been appointed accountant, Munks subjected the books to a constant scrutiny, which ultimately resulted—as it was bound to do—in the discovery of one or two small errors. Conscious that he was doing his work carefully and well, this espionage irritated Staunton, who was independent and hot tempered on occasion. In the course of a year there were several disagreements and minor wrangles between the accountant and assistant manager, and in the course of one of these, the latter made some caustic remarks concerning certain erasures he had noticed in the cash book. Staunton construed these remarks into a reflection on his honesty, and from that day on his dislike of Munks ripened into positive hatred, and a violent rupture was not far off. It came at length, for Munks noticed an alteration where Staunton had erroneously entered the amount of a cheque, and afterwards corrected it, and he then and there point blank accused the youthful accountant of falsifying the books. At this, all restraint flying to the winds, Staunton's passion burst forth, and exclaiming, "You gutter-bred cur, I'll shake the life out of you," he

seized the burly Munks, shook him till his cheeks quivered like jelly, and then pushed him over a stool into a corner. Furious, Munks picked himself up, and rushed at his assailant ; but the latter, striking out as he came, dealt him a tremendous blow on the chest, which knocked him into the corner again, where he lay gasping. This affair, which had lasted only a few moments, made a noise fit to waken the dead, and everyone in the office rushed in to see what was the matter, one of the first to arrive from an inner room being Mr. Whitegate, who took in the whole scene at a glance.

Staunton, who felt the manager's keen, cold eye rest on him inquiringly for a moment, knew, instinctively, that he was "doomed ;" and, though he gave a full explanation, and made a bold and manly defence, he was not surprised, some hours later, to receive a note, wherein he was informed that his services were dispensed with as from that day, though salary to the end of the current month would be allowed him. He regretted the loss of his excellent position, but was not greatly cast down thereby, as he had made a wide circle of business and social acquaintances in the town, and would, he thought, be commended, rather than condemned, for his vigorous method of treating Munk's imputations. He was surprised to find, however, on his return from a kangaroo-hunting expedition, which lasted a week or ten days, that employment was not

easily to be obtained in Stanley, and that all vacancies had been "just filled," "promised," or something of the kind. He spent a month in fruitless endeavours, and in this time became friendly with Ryan, who had, like himself, been in the employ of Sellbridge & Co., but in a different department of their extensive business, and had also been dismissed some months earlier. Ryan was equally unsuccessful in *his* efforts to find employment, and a community in misfortune drew the two men together, and they became friends, though their characters were widely different, Ryan being as taciturn and moody as Staunton was loquacious and gay, despite the fact that the former was an Irishman and the latter an Englishman. They met constantly, and after a week or two Staunton suggested that, as there was a vacant room where he boarded, Ryan should take up his quarters in the same house. To this the latter assented, though he had previously always preferred to live by himself, being a reserved and unsociable man, of whom no one in Stanley knew more than that he had been engaged in Melbourne to manage a department in Sellbridge's, and that, during the years he had been with the firm, he had carried out his duties with quiet ability and sound knowledge. In physical appearance he was tall, thin, dark-haired and sallow, with a long and rather lugubrious face, and as, in addition, his manners were cold, he was voted "a stick" by young men, a nonentity by their elders, and



ignored altogether by women. He had, however, apparently one friend—a mild-looking young man with spectacles—who occasionally came to see him from Melbourne, and was generally understood to be a chemist, but no one else was ever known to bear him company, until fate threw Staunton in his way.

So much for the gentlemen who are now enjoying their tea, and a “cike” specially prepared for them by Miss Williams, as some compensation for the lacteal failure of the “kyiow.”

## CHAPTER II.

AT the date of the opening of this story, the town of Stanley was almost entirely supported by agriculture, for which the district around was rapidly becoming celebrated. But, like many Victorian towns, it owed its origin to gold, which, in the year 1852, had been found on what was then known as "Stanley's Creek," and for a couple of years the Stanley Field was the scene of extensive mining operations. Amongst those who came to the place in search of gold was Arthur Sellbridge, a young man recently arrived from England. Sellbridge was what has been contemptuously termed, a "kid glove" digger, that is, a man who had deserted the desk for the spade, and, in the fifties, men of this kind, after a brief experience of the toil and privations of a gold-seeker's life, usually returned to occupations that were more in accord with their previous training—finding their way to office stools, or, in some cases, to the old familiar counter. Sell-

bridge, who had been a civil engineer, proved no exception to this rule, and, soon tiring of digging, he determined to try something else. Having made a few hundreds of pounds on the diggings, he opened a small store, which proved an immediate success, and ; as the gold gave out, and Stanley's Creek became Stanley, a prosperous town in a rich agricultural district, he gradually altered the character of his business, till, in the course of years, it lost all trace of its origin, became purely mercantile and financial, and assumed very large proportions.

Directly his fortune was assured, Mr. Sellbridge, who had been engaged to be married before he left England, sent home for his fiancée, was married, and enjoyed much happiness for two years. But then his dearly-loved wife died, shortly after the birth of a son, and Sellbridge was left to mourn in solitude. His stimulus in working had been love, for he was a man who cared little for wealth or position, and had only toiled for the sake of the vanished one, with whom he hoped to pass his life in happiness ; but in almost a moment his cherished dream had vanished. She lay yonder on the sunny slope, and his worldly success became as Dead Sea fruit. He worked on, however, for the sake of the child, but, not being a robust man, his health gave way, while he was yet comparatively young, and he died when only forty-four years of age, leaving all he possessed, in trust, for his son Harry, then a boy of ten.

On Mr. Sellbridge's will being read, it occasioned great surprise—and a good deal of disgust amongst persons who had hopes for themselves—when it was found that he had left explicit instructions that the management of the business was to be placed in the hands of Richard Whitegate, a very young man, who had been his confidential clerk. Everyone, in a moment, foresaw disaster as a result of this appointment, and it was prophesied that the firm would not last three years under the new management. Strange to say, however, it *did* last, and, what was more singular still, slowly, but very steadily, gained power, till, in fifteen years from the founder's death, it had become a large concern indeed, and Harry Sellbridge, had he chosen, could have occupied the leading mercantile position in his native town.

He, however, remained in Europe, whither, under instructions contained in his father's will, he had been sent for his education ; and the management remained with Mr. Whitegate. This gentleman, now in his thirty-seventh year, was a tall, fine-looking man, whose pale, regular features, carefully-trimmed brown beard, and neat attire, contrasted strongly with the Silenus-like visages, aggressive hairiness, and ill-fitting garments of some of the older business men of Stanley—the survivals from the goldfields era.

Mr. Whitegate's business colleagues (of the old colonial mercantile school at all events) were inclined

to be rough, boisterous, and, perhaps, a trifle "loud," but he in no way resembled them. His habitual expression was one of calm, and he was never known to become excited, or exhibit temper, and was invariably polite. Notwithstanding this suavity, though, those who were brought into close contact with him, soon learned that he was not to be trifled with, and that his requests were commands that must be obeyed. He did not take his staff into his confidence, but those who remained with him for some years found that if they carried out his instructions without question or comment, and attended regularly to their duties, they were liberally paid and well treated.

The business steadily expanded, as has been said, and exercised considerable authority in the affairs of many sheep farmers and selectors for fifty miles around. It also had dealings with most firms and financial institutions in Stanley, very many in Melbourne, and was, in a quiet, unostentatious way, a power in the land.

Australia is such a new country that there is little accumulated capital there; the people are ambitious, and desirous of commencing where their parents, the Europeans, left off, and so borrowing has become the policy of the country—Governmental, Municipal, and private. Brown borrows from Jones, Jones from Smith, Smith from Mortgage & Co., they from a bank, the bank from the public, and the public from England, and so the wheel runs round.

Anyone who has money can very easily find employment for it, with a little risk, and Sellbridge & Co., having plenty of money, had half the district "under their thumb," and raked in interest from far and near. In fact, money-lending was by far the most lucrative part of their business, though they would probably have denied this, and, moreover, would have deprecated the use of such a harsh term as "money-lending" in connection with a firm like theirs, and employed that of "financing" instead.

While the financial side grew, the mercantile business of the firm remained stationary, or nearly so, and, as financing in such cases is mainly one man's work, and does not occasion much clerical labor, the staff did not increase in proportion to the business done, and was, in fact, very small for so large a concern. Mr. Whitegate arranged all the loans himself (with occasional assistance from Munks), and, in fact, Sellbridge's was "a one man show," as the common term is. While all this expansion was taking place, and he was being made wealthy by commerce and financing—conducted by others—the youthful owner of this great concern remained away, and seemed quite content to let things run on in the course laid down by his father. Little or nothing was known of Harry Sellbridge in Stanley, the inhabitants of which town rarely went further than Melbourne, but one or two men, such as Staunton, who had seen him in England, reported that he was, in

appearance, "very Australian"—tall, thin, and wiry—but of his character and tastes, they knew nothing more than was indicated by his constant appearances in connection with sport. He had been seen once or twice at Cowes, in the yachting season, had been heard of as the guest of a wealthy Englishman, whose grouse moors in Scotland were famous in shooting circles, and finally, on the authority of an Australian bookmaker, who had spent a season in England, was reported to have lost £1,000 on a certain Derby.

All these matters, pieced together, left no doubt in the minds of the people of Stanley that Harry Sellbridge was a sporting character, if not downright wild; and the elders shook their heads, as they prophesied ruin if he did not take to hard work, which had made his father's fortune. The young men agreed with this opinion when in the presence of their fathers or employers, with whom circumstances, connected with financial supply, compelled them to affect to agree, though they secretly despised them as fossils, and wondered why Nature had not fixed fifty years as the duration of human life, instead of seventy or eighty. When by themselves, however, they gave vent to very different opinions, and young Forrester voiced the junior male thought of Stanley, when, leaning back against the mantelpiece of the billiard-room in the Literary Club (so called because numerous "books" were made within its walls), he said, "Come back here

and graft if I had Harry Sellbridge's money ! No (lurid phraseology) fear ! Just give me half of it, and this (descriptive adjective) place would see my back in twenty-four hours." Mr. Jack Forrester was moved to express himself thus, because his father had said something diametrically opposite a few hours before, when talking to Mr. Copplestone, and Jack, on principle, disagreed with everything "the old man" said, openly or behind his back.

The "Copplestone" above mentioned was a solicitor, and the sole surviving trustee in Sellbridge's estate, and he, worthy man, though easy going and somewhat dilatory, was so disturbed by the numerous rumours concerning young Sellbridge's idle and sporting habits, that he determined to write to the young man, and urge him to return and look after his business. He despatched his letter, but the months went by and brought no reply, so he wrote another, which met with a similar fate, and then, Mr. Copplestone, feeling that he had done his duty, gave the matter up. "I have done my best," he remarked to Mr. Forrester, "and the young man's affairs now rest in his own hands. The business is going on splendidly under Whitegate's management, but the position is an unusual one, and I like to see matters conducted on perfectly clear and defined lines."

"Quite right, quite right, Mr. Copplestone," responded that worthy opportunist, Mr. Forrester.



“Your ideas are exactly mine. ‘Have everything plain and defined,’ is my motto.”

“Your motto,” muttered the speaker’s affectionate son, who overheard the remark. “Your motto is, ‘Keep on the side of the strongest man,’ ” and he surveyed his “venerated” parent with a hostile and contradictory eye, but, in view of certain financial exigencies of his own, judged it wiser to restrain his feelings till fate gave him an opportunity to really unfold his mind to—and *on*—“the old man.”

## CHAPTER III.

It is almost worth while to suffer the torments of a hot wind in order to fully enjoy the revivifying influence of a change. Rain almost invariably follows a "Brickfielder," and a cool wind coming up from the South restores the requisite proportion of oxygen to the air, and sets the pulses beating freely once more.

For three days Mr. Staunton had not been able to summon up sufficient energy even to shave, but on the fourth morning—a change of weather having set in on the previous evening—he was out of bed, dressed, shaved, and digging in the garden, fully an hour before breakfast. Since arriving in Australia he had become imbued with the notion that, as the land is the main source of wealth, every able-bodied man, in a new country, ought to go on to the land, and he was now qualifying himself for an agricultural life by digging a plot of land for potatoes in Mrs. Williams' garden. He worked at this spasmodically, and sometimes was

hopeful about it, sometimes despondent, but Ryan was wholly the latter, for he had made a calculation, which proved that, at Staunton's average rate of progression, the plot would not be ready for seed before the year 1930.

Staunton was in rare form this morning, and was destroying Ryan's arithmetical base in square feet per minute, when he was interrupted by the approach of Miss Williams, who said, "Ow! Mr. Staunton, you *are* working hard this morning. You'll brike your heart, or the spine, if you go on so fast." Staunton was surprised to observe that the speaker was dressed in her street costume, and had evidently come from the town; surprised because that fascinating "nitive" did not, as a rule, waste her charms in the morning, when appreciative observers were few, but reserved them for the afternoon, or evening, when, clad in her "nivy-blue" dress, "silor" hat, and carrying her white "lice" parasol, she frequently "did the block" for an hour or so. Her object in displaying the above singularly-named articles of adornment was not to excite the admiration of the males, whom she despised, but to arouse the envy of her own sex. Envy is, according to Pindar, the most contemptible of human weaknesses, and many people of to-day will agree with the ancient writer in this. Why, then, do otherwise fairly moral (the word is used in its widest sense) women take pleasure in exciting this detestable feeling in the breasts of other women?

Perhaps they are unconscious of the moral obliquity of their acts. In Miss Williams' case it was so, and she derived immense gratification from the thought that her parasol inflicted pain on Miss Binks, who had lately wounded her (Miss Williams) with a pair of tan boots. Being scrupulously particular in every respect, Miss Williams would not venture forth on the most trifling errand without wearing her full panoply, and, on the present occasion, was resplendent, though her business had been nothing more important than the purchase of two penn'orth of milk, to take the place of that usually yielded by the domestic animal, now irritably referred to by the exhausted lady as "That blessed old kyiw."

Staunton was sympathetic, and remarked, "You will never do any good with that cow, Miss Williams, till you have green stuff to give her. In hot weather all the grass dries up, and the animal follows suit. Now, if this patch I am digging were sown with lucerne for the cow, we should have milk all the year round. By Jove! that's a good idea. I'll give up the potatoes, and sow lucerne instead."

Miss Williams smiled doubtfully, reflecting inwardly that if the cow had to wait for Mr. Staunton's lucerne, she would remain dry for some time, and to turn the conversation said, "You will want your white traasers to-day, Mr. Staunton, for you will be going to the cricket field, as usual, I suppose?"

"Well, no, not to-day; for, as the weather has become so cool, I think I will go out to Tatoora."

"Why, I thought you had given up going there, now that Miss Forrester is engaged again."

"She had nothing to do with my going there. But what do you mean by saying she is 'engaged again?'"

"Well, this is her seventh."

"Her seventh!" said Staunton, amazed.

"Yes. They say she has a bricelet made of old engiment rings."

"Heavens! And is that sort of thing common?"

"Ow! now. At least, not so many times as that, though lots of girls get engaged three or four times." Leaving Staunton to reflect on the value of a maiden's "troth" in Stanley, and to pursue his preparations for the potatoes, or lucerne, Miss Williams entered the house, and having doffed her finery, proceeded to help her mother to cook the dreadful chop, which, a misdemeanour in England, is a crime in Australia, where it is frequently cut from an animal that a few hours before was feeding in the paddock or stall.

"I wish to goodness they would pass an Act prohibiting chops," grumbled the dyspeptic Ryan, as he was endeavoring to masticate an extra tough one at breakfast.

"Then the existence of the country would be at steak," remarked Staunton.

"Your pun is beneath contempt, but your statement

is true, for Australia almost lives on the sheep—makes money out of its wool, and eats the animal itself.”

“Well, it is a sheep way of living,” muttered Staunton.

Ryan looked sour, and said, “What do you intend to do to-day?”

“I mean to go to Forrester’s, being curious to see if my reception by the rest of the family will resemble that accorded me by the old gentleman yesterday.”

“You can make yourself easy on that score. They will be glad to see you, and as for that masterly rail-sitter, Forrester himself, he will receive you rather cordially next time he meets you, and will take care to keep on friendly terms till he is certain that you are definitely on the down grade, or intend to accept his advice and leave for Melbourne.”

“I may have to do the latter to avoid the former.”

“And you may not. I have not made my promised suggestion yet, but will do so when I have called on three or four people to-day.” So saying, Ryan rose from the table, and left the house.

Staunton spent the forenoon in extending the lucerne plot, and after lunch set forth for Tatoora, the suburb in which Mr. Forrester’s villa was situated. Passing through the main street of the town, he soon left shops and warehouses behind, and skirting a region of small wooden houses and rough paling fences, entered one of trim cottages (“villas” their owners called them),

built of wood, painted white or cream color, and standing in quarter or eighth-acre sections. The front portion of each section was laid down as a lawn or flower garden, and bounded by wooden picket-fences, painted like the house. These little lawns and gardens presented a picture of refreshing greenness at a time when the open country around was burnt brown by the fierce sun rays, while the perfume of the numerous flowers was pleasant to nostrils irritated for days past by smoke from bush fires and dust conveyed by the North Wind. Mr. Forrester's house was a comfortable, unambitious, single-story villa, possessing wide verandahs and cool blinds to temper the heat, and surrounded by well-kept lawns and shrubberies. There was also an unusual number of flower-beds, one of the owner's affectations being "a taste for botany." In the bush he could scarcely have distinguished Sassafras from Ti-tree, but in his own garden, where everything was staked off, labelled, and read up, he was "at home" in every sense. "This is one of our native flowers," he would remark to the visitor, "the you geeniar Smithseye" (*Eugenia Smithii*) "vulgarly called the 'Lilly Pilly,' a lovely plant. This next is the Mary Ann thus big none i cuss" (*Marianthus Bignoniaceus*), "an Australian parasite or climber—striking thing," and so on by the mile, all the time that about the only earthly knowledge he really possessed was the relative degrees of soundness, unsoundness, honesty, or dishonesty, of

his bank's numerous customers.

The servant who answered Staunton's knock showed him into the cool drawing-room, where sat the heroine of numerous engagements, Miss Forrester, languidly fanning herself, and killing time apparently without the aid of book or needle work. She rose as Staunton entered, shook hands, tried to smile, and then, fatigued by these exertions, sat down again. This young lady, who was perhaps twenty-five years of age, was considered very handsome, possessing, as she did, the typical Australian figure—tall, slender, and graceful, regular features, and rich brown hair. Her eyes, which were of a cold light grey, and the extreme immobility of her features would not, however, be pleasing to those who deem evidences of vivacity indispensable to true beauty. She conversed with her visitor in tones which exhibited a trace of the local accent, though this was not nearly so pronounced as in Miss Williams' case.

"I am glad you called, Mr. Staunton; you must be tired after walking up from town" (it was not "town" and it was not "taan," but something between the two.) "I did not expect to see you to-day. You generally go to the cricket field on Thursdays, don't you?"

After a few more commonplaces, Staunton, who was rather loquacious, plunged into conversation, to which Miss Forrester contributed little more than "Yes" and



“No,” but sat still, the movement of the arm that held the fan being the only sign that she was alive. She exhibited only her customary manner, however, and Staunton was soon satisfied that *she*, at all events, knew nothing of her father’s change of manner towards him. He need never have imagined anything else, as Miss Forrester took not the slightest interest in her father’s affairs, or his likes or dislikes.

Staunton gossiped away, and presently, happening to strike on a topic which interested him (namely, the beauty of certain New Zealand scenes, which he had visited when on his way out from England), he warmed up, and became quite fluent and enthusiastic. In the midst of an eloquent description of the volcanic country in the North Island, he suddenly felt as if an icy stream had been poured on his sultry subject, for his listener, who had sat perfectly unmoved during the recital, said, “Excuse me for a moment, and I will tell mother that you are here ; she will be glad to see you,” and she went out, leaving him to talk volcanoes to the furniture, if he were so minded. He had often been in the room before, but for some reason it had not struck him till to-day that few or no books lay on the tables, or that the bric-a-brac and smaller articles would have seemed all the better had they possessed a personal interest, such as would be apparent were they made up of odd articles, collected here and there in the course of travelling by the owners or others ; but, as it was, the

things seemed as if they had been bought at so much per dozen in a shop.

"I am developing an amazing habit of observation," thought Staunton, in a sort of admiration of himself, "and presently, if I don't look out, I shall begin wondering why things are done this way, or that; commence theorising, and all the rest of it. I have caught myself edging off in that direction once or twice lately, and I must check the evil habit."

His meditations were here interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Forrester, a brisk and well-preserved woman of fifty, whose beady little eyes were as bright and keen as her daughter's were the reverse, while her quick movements and vigorous gestures were in marked contrast to the younger lady's listlessness.

It has been said that Staunton was a talker, but he could not get a word in edgeways with Mrs. Forrester, who fenced him in by drawing a chair close up to the sofa on which he sat, and, having secured him, indulged herself with quarter-of-an-hour's cross examination on matters of local interest.

"I am so pleased to see you again, Mr. Staunton," she said at the end of this. "You have neglected us for quite a long time. I hope you are quite well, and that you have succeeded in obtaining another appointment?"

"I have not been so fortunate."

"Indeed. And are you still at Mrs. Williams'?"

"Yes."

“ You must find it lonely living there by yourself ? ”

“ I have a companion now—Mr. Ryan.”

“ Oh ! He used to be at Sellbridge’s too, I believe ? And does Miss Williams not show any sign of changing her state ? ”

“ Not that I am aware of.”

“ She professes to despise men, you know. Her father was a shocking character—idle and intemperate, and always lived on his wife—and that is the source whence Miss Williams derived her prejudice, though I doubt very much if the prejudice is a genuine one, and imagine there is something of the sour grapes nature in it ; though, of course, I don’t know her personally, and only hear of her through my dressmaker, you know.”

Staunton suppressed a yawn.

“ And is there no news of Mr. Sellbridge, or word of his coming out ? ” went on the ruthless lady. This question answered in the negative, she plied him with half-a-dozen others, and then, having learned all that he could, or would, tell, she proceeded to entertain him with a dissertation on local affairs, and the family history of the principal people in Stanley and district. As an historical lecturer she was very successful, for she knew, or appeared to know, everybody’s business and connections. The Jones’ father had been a butcher, suspected of not studying very closely the brands of all the cattle he killed ; Smith had made his money by failing three times ; the Brown’s were descended from

a Van Dieman's Land ticket-of-leave man ; the Sullivan's father once kept a greengrocer's shop in Melbourne ; Mrs. Jackson had been a barmaid in Guzzler's Hotel, in Collins-street, and so on, and so on, the personal note being maintained from start to finish.

Staunton had once heard Ryan say, "I take no interest in persons," and this had led him to discover that he himself did not take very much interest in persons, or, at all events, such as provided the subject-matter of small talk in Stanley. Finding the present conversation become irksome, he was endeavoring to make his escape, when Mrs. Forrester said, "You will stay for afternoon tea, will you not ? The girls intend to take it on the verandah, and we expect Mr. Townsend—my daughter is engaged to him, you know—he is an Englishman like yourself, and is very well connected at home. His father keeps a pack of beadles, and hunts them himself." Staunton grinned as the thought occurred to him that Charles Dickens would have enjoyed "Beadle" hunting. Mrs. Forrester went on, unheeding his smile, "Mr. Townsend has an allowance from his father, and has taken up land near here. My husband had something to do with getting the land for him, through Sellbridge & Co., and we have known him ever since he came. He is such a nice young fellow." With the unavoidable insincerity of such occasions, Staunton, who had heard it said that Townsend was a fool, answered, "I am sure of that,"

and having uttered this untruth, followed his hostess to the verandah, where, seated round a small table, were Miss Forrester and two other young ladies—her sister, and a friend named Miss Davis. The latter had been to a dance on the previous evening, and was now describing the dresses of some of the ladies present, in even and unenthusiastic tones.

Miss Mary Forrester, who was the third daughter (Staunton had once heard that there was a second, but that she had done “something dreadful,” and had gone away years ago, no one knew whither), was as tall as, but much stouter than, her sister, and possessed skin of such milky fairness, and hair of such extremely light color, that she might almost have been taken for an albino. She was seventeen or eighteen years of age, and still wore her hair “down,” which is, we are credibly informed, a distinctive mark of juvenility amongst civilised females.

As Mrs. Forrester took her seat at the table, she remarked to Miss Davis, “So you were at the Copplestone’s dance last night? It is really wonderful how those people can give such a number of dances, for Mr. Copplestone’s profession is not worth much to him. I suppose the Sellbridge trusteeship is his main source of income?”

Staunton was a friend of Mr. Copplestone’s, and not wishing to discuss his affairs or hear them discussed, he endeavored to turn the conversation by asking Miss

Davis if she had read in that day's paper of the great success achieved by Madame ——— in Paris.

"Madame ——— interrupted Mrs. Forrester, "That is Mrs. ———, I know her ; daughter of ———" and she was branching off into the family history of the *Diva*, when Staunton intervened by saying, "She has a beautiful voice, and a man who had heard her sing told me that she was almost equal to Patti, if——"

"There's Jack coming up the walk," said Miss Mary Forrester, and the worthy son of the house hove in sight, a cigarette in his mouth, and his hat tilted well forward on his brow—as was then the fashion amongst those to whom any deviation in the manner of wearing head-gear, etc., is of importance. He approached the group on the verandah, said, "Hallo ! Alice," to Miss Davis, "How do, Staunton ?" to the latter, and then sat down.

"What have you been doing all day, Jack ?" asked his sister, as she handed him a cup of tea and slice of cake.

"Oh ! grafting for 'the old man,' as usual. Old Dawson and he have been hunting for a penny these three weeks, and were getting crazy over the job, so they put me on to it."

"Hunting for a penny ?" said Staunton.

"Yes. Their cash did not balance by a penny, and they would not rest till they found it. All these bank and accountant fellows are the same ; they'll spend ten

pounds in labor, ink, and gas, to find a penny that's wrong in the balance. The books must be right, no matter how the business fares. Why, I remember 'the old man' and Dawson made the cash balance exactly the time that Bolter, the teller (who was away on a holiday, they thought), had got clear off to China with a good few thousands. A fat lot of good their book-keeping is," and Mr. Forrester, Junior, sniffed in contempt.

"Did you find the penny to-day?" asked Staunton, amused.

"Oh! yes."

"An error in the books, I suppose?"

"Not likely. Simply old Dawson's blindness. The penny had slipped into a chink in the drawer, and was standing half in and half out, when I found it."

Miss Davis now resumed her account of the Copplestone's dance, and in the course of her description said something about the garden in which Mr. Copplestone had succeeded in growing almost every flowering shrub and creeper indigenous to Australia.

Staunton was interested in this, and presently asked Miss Davis several questions about the plants, but she could give him little information. He then drifted into some remarks concerning the wild flowers of Australia, which were very beautiful, he said, notably the Waratah, which, when growing amongst the rocks on the mountain-sides, presents a lovely sight. "It is

singular," he went on, "that though the Australian forest-trees are far from beautiful, the wild flowers and flowering shrubs are amongst——"

"Here's Mr. Townsend," said Miss Mary Forrester, as she observed someone ride up the road. The new-comer dismounted at the gate, tied his horse to a ring fixed in the post, and then walked up to the house. As he approached, Staunton could see that he belonged to that remarkable English social genius, "Chappie" (which is apparently in danger of becoming extinct now that clothes are getting cheaper). He was a tall, fair-haired young fellow, with a retreating forehead, projecting front teeth, and a perfectly smooth and vapid face. His attire was such as would be worn by those who pound round the tan in Hyde Park at mid-winter, though the temperature was then about eighty-seven degrees in the shade, and demanded a light jacket, thin cricketing shirt, loose, easy trousers, and a pith helmet or wide-awake hat. "Haw de daw," he said, in the singular patois of his genus, which bears only a slight relation to English. "Awf'ly waum, isn't it? Bai Jove, Ai don't know wy they say Austwalia has a tempwate climate—seems to me twopical, bai Jove," and he fanned himself with his hat.

"You are not used to it yet," said Mrs. Forrester. "But let me introduce Mr. Staunton, an Englishman, like yourself."

"Aw! Haw de daw," said Mr. Townsend, and



Staunton, as he shook hands, could not help thinking how flatly this exaggerated "side" would fall in latter-day England.

After a few more remarks, prefaced with "Bai Jove," or "Awf'ly," Mr. Townsend, having accepted a cup of tea, sat down beside his fiancée, who did not seem pleased, or the reverse, by his presence.

Mrs. Forrester, who was never happy unless asking questions or imparting information about some person, referred to Ryan again, and asked Staunton if he thought his "gloomy friend could not be induced to take a ticket for the forthcoming hospital ball?"

"No," he replied. "Ryan never goes out, and dislikes social entertainments."

"What a strange man. Has he met with a disappointment in love or anything?"

"I do not know. He keeps very much to himself, and is very self-contained."

"How miserable he must be," said Mrs. Forrester, feelingly. (*She* could not have lived for a day without other people to talk with—and *of*.)

"He is not in the least miserable, I assure you, and gets on so well that really I have begun to question if a self-contained existence is not the best. I should think, for instance, that a hermit must have a good life on the whole, free from care and——"

"Mamma, there's Spot in the flower-bed," said Miss Mary Forrester, but Staunton continuing, said to her

sister, "Would a life of isolation suit you, Miss Forrester?"

"I don't know," replied the lady addressed.

"There's a mosquito on your nose, Jack," said Miss Mary Forrester, to her brother.

"I must go now, Emily," said Miss Davis.

Staunton found himself wondering, as he walked back to his lodgings, why it was that he felt somewhat "flat," if not actually depressed.

## CHAPTER IV.

"WELL, Ryan," said Staunton, when they met again at tea, "what luck did you have to-day?"

"Just as I expected. A refusal in every case, and not a word of encouragement, except from one man, Hardy, of the District Bank. He was very kind, but could do nothing at present. He may be of use to us yet, however."

"I confess I cannot see how. For it seems to me that we have tried everything possible, and have now nothing left to do except leave for Melbourne, as we have been so frequently advised."

Ryan pursued his meal in silence for a few minutes, and then said, "It is because of that very advice that I have decided not to go."

"I do not grasp your meaning."

"When you've known them as long as I have, you will learn that men like Forrester, Perkins, and their lot, do not give you advice without some good reason

of their own for so doing. Do you really suppose that any of the men who so kindly favored us with the opinion that we should get on famously in Melbourne, care one jot whether we get on or go to the deuce? If you do you are sadly in error. It is easy for me to see that our kind advisers wish us out of Stanley, and that they are in league, or sympathy, with the opposition I mentioned to you yesterday. Were fortune alone against me in this matter I should accept my repulses without a murmur, but this is no question of fortune, I am convinced, but one of an enemy's contriving. And therefore, from a spirit of opposition to unmerited attack (and also on principle), I mean to stay here and fight this thing out, while I have head, hands, strength, money, and credit."

"But who is the mysterious opponent, or rather, whom do you suspect?" said Staunton, looking at Ryan, as if he imagined him to be a little crazy.

"I am not certain of the individual yet, but the movement comes from Sellbridge's, I feel sure."

"I should like to know how you came to form that opinion?"

"Well, after both you and I had been rebuffed by half-a-dozen firms that I well knew could have given us employment, I began to feel that there was something more than coincidence in the matter, and turning the thing over in my mind, in connection with the fact that other ex-employees of Sellbridge's had experienced

the same fortune, I soon came to the conclusion that it was the firm that pulled the wires, for all the people who refused us were in some way associated with, or dependent on, Sellbridge & Co."

"Of course they have many people in Stanley and district under their thumb?"

"Quite so. Forrester, for instance, your rail-sitting friend, is their banker, and stands in with them in many ways, I fancy, while Perkins has been financed by them for years past, and the Land Mortgage Co. is simply owned by them straight out, and is a dummy, existing for the purpose of taking over certain of their loans, selling people up, and other dirty work."

"Probably you are right; and I know that Smith and Jameson are in their hands."

"And Burns, in those of the Central Bank, which amounts to the same thing. In point of fact, Sellbridge & Co. can pull the wires in dozens of directions."

"Then it would be difficult to oppose them?"

"Difficult, yes; but not impossible. There are some people who are against them. Braefenfell, the lawyer, who had that case with them some years ago; the Melbourne Wool Co., and others, and I mean to utilise the opposition."

"But what do you mean to do?"

Ryan took a long drink of tea, wiped his lips, folded up his napkin with irritating deliberation, and then said, "Start a newspaper."

"You are crazy, I suspect, for that requires capital and special knowledge."

"Before I explain, let me ask you a question. Will you join me?"

"I cannot answer that till you have explained your ideas more fully."

"Well, you have £130, you told me, and I have £170. There is the capital, for you——"

"£300 where you want £3,000."

"Three fiddlesticks. My dear fellow, this is Australia, and I believe you could start a bank here if you had a ten pound note and good credit. And in our case, with the £300 as a base, we should easily be able to obtain the use of a thousand pounds more, for the risk is one almost any Australian financier would take. Two men, possessing £300, young, strong, well educated—as education goes in a commercial community—and 'Not known to the police'—that is, the financial police—who are only too well acquainted with men like Perkins, who have raised money by every expedient known to man in his present imperfectly developed state. My idea is to ask Braefenfell, the lawyer, to act as surety for us in Hardy's Bank."

"He will never do it."

"He may not for love of us, but for hate of the other people he very likely will. In this financial and commercial game you have to take love, hate, jealousy, cupidity, snobbishness, and all other human passions

and weaknesses into account, and utilise them for your own ends. I am afraid, Staunton, that you are about to turn over a dirty page of human life. But don't let its perusal depress you ; there are fairly clean lines running even through *it*, and people in the van of civilisation are already reading cleaner sheets, and believe that pages of snow printed in gold lie beyond. But we, in the rear of the march, cannot even hope to see such things yet——But I bore you with my talk. Let us go and have a game of billiards. I will take twenty in fifty from you, and lick you hands down, if you promise not to fluke."

Staunton's spirits, which had been rather depressed, rose under the influence of Ryan's confident manner, and in consequence, he played so remarkably well, and fluked so continuously, that the game became one agreeing strictly with the Asiatic's definition, "Billiards is a game played with balls and sticks by two men. One player strikes the balls and the other says 'Dam.'"

## CHAPTER V.

RYAN, next day, sought out Braefenfell, whom he found enveloped in tobacco smoke, and the dust of an exceedingly legal-looking office. "What is it, Ryan?" demanded the lawyer, throwing himself back in his seat. "Take those papers off the chair, put my hat under the table, and fire away."

Ryan did as he was told, and as he unfolded his scheme, Braefenfell's twinkling eyes exhibited increasing interest, but he refused at first to have anything to do with the venture. When, however, he had made his visitor explain his innermost motives, and "squeezed him as dry as an orange," as the victim remarked, he said he "might think about it."

"Bother your thinking," said Ryan, "I want a straight yes or no." And thus pressed, the lawyer promised to go surety to the extent of £500, only stipulating that his liability was to end there, and that the new publication was to give him support should he



require such. "It is a fine thing to have a paper at your back," he said, looking shrewdly at Ryan, "no matter what kind of a thing it is. If I had the money I'd buy up every rag in the country and make 'em publish my opinions."

"You are a terrible re-actionary," said Ryan, "and it is a good thing that you have not the command of millions, or you would soon destroy the liberty of the press."

"Liberty of the press! There is no such thing. What with debts to printer's furnishers, banks, and others, the miserable scribblers can't call their souls their own."

"Oh! Come, you must not talk like this, especially when I am just about to join the noble army of journalists."

"You will be as bad as anyone in three months, and will be quite prepared to commit perjury for a twenty pound advertisement. Go on; I know what I am talking about, and I know human nature. Clear out now, Ryan. You have persuaded me into making an ass of myself, and moreover, you have wasted five guineas worth of my time."

Ryan returned home feeling that Mr. Braefenfell took a tolerably low view of his fellow-men, and that, with all due respect to him, there was one part of human nature he did not know—the higher part.

"Lawyers always take low ground in these matters,"

he said to Staunton. "They see only the litigious and rascally side of human nature, and are apt to think there is no good in it at all. Braefenfell, who has probably seen one thousand people try to 'do' their fellow-creatures, for once he has observed a kindly or benevolent action, naturally enough makes a pretty low estimate of the amount of good to be found in men."

"And yet, he is a straight man himself, I should say."

"Perfectly so, but very suspicious. And now, Staunton, kill that mosquito which has alighted on the end of your nose, and listen to me—without interruption, please—while I unfold my scheme. You know that there are two papers in this town, the *Sun* and the *Star*, both morning papers, and both fairly strong and prosperous. The policy of the *Sun* is Conservative, and that of the *Star* Liberal and Democratic, but both are prepared to swop right round and eat their own words at any time, if it pays to do so. Each accuses the other of being a perverter of the truth, and in doing so speaks the truth—for a wonder. In fact either paper would say almost anything for fifty pounds, and this does not meet with entire approval, even in this not over-particular city. My idea is, therefore, that a certain amount of support might be forthcoming for a third paper, published in the evening, and this I propose to establish, calling it *The Moon*, as both the others have gone to the heavens for their names, and it is as well to be in the fashion." Staunton

was about to interrupt, but Ryan held up his hand and went on. "To purchase a printing plant and all the necessary adjuncts would require several thousands of pounds, but I accidentally found out some time ago (indeed it was that discovery first gave me the idea) that there is a complete plant standing idle in Stanley, the use of which could be had, with buildings and office, for a very low rental indeed, as the man who holds it, as security for a debt, has never been able to find a use for it. Now, if we can lease that plant, our capital will be practically untouched, and our cash will be available for wages and general expenses."

"But how about paper, ink, and so on," demanded Staunton.

"We can get those on credit."

"Well, I have listened to you with tolerable patience, and my opinion of the scheme is that it is an absurd one."

"You are wrong. You do not know me very well as yet ; but I am not given to rushing into mad ventures, I assure you. I am aware that this scheme is hazardous, but I have determined to take the risk, and as I said before, mean to stay here, combat this secret opposition, find out whence it originates, and make a living for myself at the same time."

There was a flash of determination in Ryan's dark eyes as he spoke, and lines of firmness about his mouth that impressed Staunton with the conviction of his

companion's moral strength. There was an audacity about the scheme, too, that attracted him, and after a little reflection he decided to join in it.

"What are we to call ourselves?" he asked, when this point was settled.

"I really have not thought of that," replied Ryan. "How would it be to take our name from the paper, and carry on business as '*The Moon, Limited*?' "

"I am afraid people would be tempted to make bad jokes by that title, and say the company was all moonshine. Besides, we could not trade as '*Limited*,' unless we took in others to form the statutory number."

"Why not simply be Ryan and Staunton, proprietors of *The Moon*? It is a fine thing to be proprietors of *The Moon*—almost as good as owning the Earth."

"Not quite. The Moon, though a visible, is not a tangible asset. But so far as the partnership is concerned, if it is all the same to you, I should prefer to keep rather in the back-ground, and call it Staunton and Ryan."

"Oh! I have no objection to posing as the senior partner."

After further discussion, it was decided that they should commence the preliminary work at once, and that when the paper was fairly started, Ryan should be editor-in-chief, while Staunton became cashier and accountant, and, in addition, acted as sub-editor, took charge of the sporting columns, and did anything else he could find time for.

Having now definitely decided to remain in Stanley, they re-engaged their rooms at Mrs. Williams' for a long term, to the great joy of their landlady and her daughter.

"Ow! Mr. Staunton," said the latter, "Mother and I are so glad that you and Mr. Ryan are staying on with us. We do like to have quiet people in the house; indeed we would not keep a regular boarding-house where all sorts of people could come and go. Ow! now," and Miss Williams shook her head with an air of haughty determination.

"We are very glad to stay on, too," said Staunton. "And now, if the cow would only return to her duty, so that we could get a little more milk——"

"Ow! Mother got a new kyioiw this morning."

"I am delighted to hear it. That's it bellowing in the garden now, I suppose?"

"Ow! now, Mr. Staunton, said Miss Williams, horrified. "That's the 'biby.'"

"Oh! the 'biby,'" said Staunton, feebly. "I didn't know you had a——ahem!——whose is it?"

"My sister 'Jine's.' She's been married two years, you know, and this is her third. The first were twins," added Miss Williams, after a pause, and Staunton, the polite, made a brave struggle to suppress a smile.

## CHAPTER VI.

HAVING fairly commenced, Messrs. Staunton and Ryan worked like galley-slaves, and the former began, for the first time in his life, to experience real "worry," and went to bed every night with a brain on fire from the mental efforts of the day, and tossed sleepless for hours, though his more seasoned partner laid aside his troubles with his clothes, and sunk to sleep the moment his head touched the pillow. The human brain was possibly never intended to bear what is called "worry," which is a very different thing from steady mental labor. But such is the wonderful adaptability of the organisation that the brain will sustain a surprising amount of strain, only weakening or giving way when the tension is carried beyond all reason, as happened in the case of the First Napoleon, who exhausted the mental energies that would have sufficed to carry him through a life of seventy years in half that time.

The brain cannot, however, adapt itself to great

effort immediately, and Staunton, like other young men who are commencing the great battle of life, unaided by inherited wealth or influence, felt the strain severely for some months. At this period he greatly envied Ryan, who met all troubles with a philosophical indifference, but in time a measure of philosophy—or callousness—came to himself. Ryan, who was careful and patient, made all arrangements with great caution and such secrecy that no suspicion of the projected movement got abroad till almost all preliminaries had been settled, and the printing plant secured on lease for a couple of years. Such business as securing supplies of ink, paper, and other requisites was completed with comparative ease, but the engagement of a suitable staff of workers gave the partners a great deal of trouble. The moment it became generally known that a new paper was about to be started in Stanley, the office was besieged by all sorts and conditions of men in search of a job. Every hour in the day Staunton or Ryan would be interviewed by some individual who had had “a lengthy press experience,” and was prepared to report, canvass, collect money, or do anything, in fact. Nine out of ten of these callers were, in the vernacular, “down on their uppers,” and were given away by their boots, even if their shiny clothes and alcoholically husky voices did not perform that office for them. Sometimes the applicant would enter with a certain air of swagger, and an assumption

of style, in ludicrous contrast to his seedy attire, and throwing himself negligently into a chair, would offer his services to the new papaw, in—aw—any capacity. “Ai have had a considerable literary experience, and Ai need scarcely say that mai education has been of the highest clauss. Ai was twenty yeahs in the Imperial Awmy, and mai brothaw is now in the Gawds.”

His statements would be accepted as being true, which they no doubt were, but as he omitted to state an important fact, namely, that he was given over soul and body to the alcohol fiend, his application would not be entertained, and he would, after ineffectually trying to borrow a shilling, depart, complaining that it was “Hawd lines that an old Imperial Officali could not find employment.”

Several B's.A. of Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin were amongst the applicants, and one of the latter explained, with a cheerful, can't-help-it air, that he might have become a Professor of his University but for the fact that he unfortunately had “a great *penchant* for beer.”

They came in swarms—whence, no man could say—seedy, shabby, often dirty, but brazen, swaggering, and all with choice phrases tripping off their tongues, for they were all of that most hopeless class—educated loafers. How Australia does swarm with such men; and how deep must be her debt of gratitude to England, the kind parent who hands over her own loafers and inebriates to the care of the young country!



"You are a hopeless sot, James," says John Bull, *pere*, to his shaking son, "And you will never mend your ways, I can see. Here are two hundred pounds. Take your passage to Australia, and never let me see you again." James departs, and free from any shadow of restraint, commences a drinking bout on board ship, which continues with few breaks during the voyage, and only ends in Australia when all his money has been spent, whereupon he joins the great army of loafers which infest that country.

Then the good Englishman, reading up his statistics, says, "Keally—ah—Australia seems to be a most intemperate country, and her proportion of lunatics is also very high—very high, indeed. Sad to think that a new country with every possible advantage of climate and soil should so soon exceed the old in vice." (Groans and shakes his head).

The question is, "When will the Australian Colonies federate on the loafer question, charter a cattle boat, and send back such of the incapables as can be proved to be of English birth to their dear native land?" Imagine the roar of horror that would burst from "the great throat of London" should such a craft come steaming up the Thames with a cargo whose capacity for absorbing liquids equalled that of the Desert of Sahara! Australia will have to look into this loafer question if she is not willing to become the dumping ground for half the failures of the world. Her climate

makes her a loafer's paradise, for it is possible to live in the open air almost all the year round. Food exists in an abundance quite unknown in Europe. The great bush is always open to the "dead beat," and the settlers are lenient and free-handed to a degree unknown in older countries. How the soul of the frost-bitten London loafer would fly to that Southern Elysium did he but know of it, and how his body would fly also if he happened to have just one relative left who would pay twenty pounds in order to get rid of him for good.

The long miles of ocean and the hard-hearted steamship companies are better friends to the Australians than the latter are perhaps aware of.

Staunton and Ryan were so harassed in the end by applications for work, that they engaged a boy to sit in the outer office and tell all who called that this was "a teetotal establishment, in which no one would be engaged unless he brought a testimonial of sobriety and good character, signed by a doctor, a magistrate, and two police constables." Before this awful array the applicants retired like sheep before a boundary-rider, and a great tranquility fell upon the wily partners. They could not afford to pay really first-rate men, and did not want to engage anyone locally, so had to be satisfied with an elderly foreman printer, named Brady (with whom they received the following testimonial from their agent in Melbourne: "He is the best all-

round man in Australia—*when he keeps straight,*") and three or four youths, who were steady, but inexperienced. As reporter and canvasser they engaged a Mr. Wilks, who had known the inside of every newspaper office (and tavern also, they suspected) in Fleet-street, before he had transferred his talents to Australia.

Of the ability of Messrs. Wilks and Brady in their respective branches there was not a doubt—it was their weakness that was the rock ahead.

Soon the office was organised, and all ready for the first issue of the paper. Then Ryan prepared a glowing introductory leader, in which many things were promised, and *The Moon* declared to be as she ought, "A shedder of light on dark places," and also, "A reflector on Stanley of the glorious light of knowledge from the intellectual suns of other lands." Staunton wrote ten foolscap folios of sporting notes, by *Viator*, not in the least knowing what *Viator* meant. Mr. Wilks dashed off fifteen locals and a sub-leader. Brady and his assistants commenced setting up type with vigor, and everything was progressing famously when an unexpected hitch occurred.

Ryan was busy in his office when Mr. Brady appeared in the doorway, his spectacles on his forehead and a perplexed look on his withered face. "This leader of yours can't be set, Mr. Ryan," he said.

"Why?" demanded the editor-in-chief, with a touch of indignation.

"Because there isn't a long primer 'f' in the place, and the leaders should be set in long primer."

"But I understood that the type was complete?"

"I cannot find an 'f' in the fount, and I have looked everywhere. I suspect someone who was short took them, or they may have been lost."

"This is awkward," said Ryan. "I can't very well write a long leader without an *f* in it, and we have not time to send to Melbourne for type."

Here Staunton, who had come in, interposed, and said, "I believe I could write a leader without an *f* in it."

Ryan looked at him doubtfully, but seeing that he seemed confident said, "Very well. Go ahead, and give it to Brady when you finish." The editor then went on with his own work, and immersed in this, forgot all about the leader till Brady entered again.

"This 'copy' of Mr. Staunton's —" he began.

"Well, what about it?"

"It won't do."

"Why?"

"Read it for yourself," said Brady, handing to Ryan some manuscript sheets, much blurred and blotted where words containing *f* had been struck out, and the editor read aloud as follows:—

"It is with mingled pride and pleasure that we introduce *The Moon* to residents in Stanley and the prosperous districts surrounding the city. We are well aware that in the local sky

there are two luminaries, but notwithstanding this, there is, in our opinion, not nearly enough light, neither being more than a one-hundred-candle planet, whereas any comparison in which candles are used would be totally inadequate to even suggest the dazzling light that our luminary will shed upon all things.

"We know that the *Sun* is in opposition to us, but the popular waves will inevitably pursue *The Moon*, as the actual ocean waves pursue the Earth's Satellite, while it is only a question of time when *The Moon* will eclipse the *Sun*, and like Juliet's eyes,

'Thro' the Heavens gleam so bright,  
That birds will sing and think it is not night.'

"'When the Moon shines out the Stars grow dim' in the Heavens, and the same thing will hold good in Stanley.

"Everyone knows the touching song, entitled, 'The Moon Behind the Hill,' but we may say at once that this has no bearing on the present case. Our *Moon* will never be 'behind the hill,' but shining over its summit, clear and beautifully bright, a torch to Stanley, to Victoria, to Australia, and—we may be allowed to hope with pardonable enthusiasm—to the civilised world. Clear, serene, refulgent, she will sail majestically through the sky of Stanley, touching here and there with a shaft of silvery light some dark and lifeless things, and instantly restoring to them full vitality, even as the pure cold kiss of Luna, the Queen of Night, is said, in ancient times, to have restored life to those who worshipped her, even though they had as many as five fatal wounds.

"Impartial and fair to all, faithful always to truth, heedless of the frowns of——"

"Oh! dash it, this is utter rot!" exclaimed Ryan, "and the last paragraph literally bristles with *f's*; he forgot all about the missing letter as he went on."

At this moment Staunton entered, and was pained and surprised to learn that his article would not do for

several reasons, the most important of which was that it contained fifteen *f*'s in a few sentences.

"I forgot all about that confounded letter," he stammered. "But I feel sure I can write the leader, Ryan, if you will let me try again."

"Do so, if you like, but for goodness' sake leave out all such rubbish as 'clear, serene, refulgent,' 'the pure cold kiss of The Queen of Night,' 'Juliet's eyes,' and all the rest, and stick to plain everyday English. The people whom we are likely to reach will be work-a-day folk, with little appreciation for any but severely common-place writing."

"Colloquial English?" said Staunton.

"Well, not exactly that, but as near it as you can go, and yet retain the literary tone."

"Very well, I will train my muse to lower flights this time—keep her within a foot of the ground, in fact." And so saying he withdrew to his own den.

Sometime afterwards Brady presented himself again to Ryan. "Well, what is it now?" demanded the latter, impatiently.

"This second article of Mr. Staunton's won't do, either." Ryan groaned, and taking the manuscript, read:—

"We have much pleasure in presenting *The Moon* to residents in Stanley. It is a smallish rag, we admit, but it will grow with the district. It is not much larger than a good sized wipe now—

"Brady, this looks a little vulgar, but there is an *f* in handkerchief."

—but by this time next year we expect that it will be as large as a bed-room towel. We have called it *The Moon* partly because it rises at night, and partly because we did not think it right that our contemporaries should monopolise the heavens, and partly because we could not invent any other name.

"It will be a plain paper, written by practical writers, and read, we hope, by practical readers—

"Brady, it's the devil keeping those *f*'s out and sense in—don't print this."

—and we are certain that it will have great power in sport, agriculture, social matters, and the like.

"We shall avoid what might be termed a 'lurid' style of writing—

"'Florid' would be a much better word here only for that *f*."

—and shall adhere always to a plain, practical, and every-day style, which, no doubt, our readers will appreciate all right. People who have to work hard all day have no time at night to track a writer through the wanderings of imagery, and what our readers want, we know, is plain, practical——"

"Bosh!" said Ryan, throwing down the sheets. "In his efforts to 'keep down,' he has simply played on the words 'plain and practical,' and strung together a number of meaningless phrases. Tell him not to go on, Brady, and I'll try to write something myself."

With some trouble Ryan managed to write a fairly good article without employing the troublesome letter *f*, but once was enough, and he immediately telegraphed to Melbourne for a supply of the letter. With

much difficulty, several small mishaps (for the machinery had not been used for a long time), and great effort on the part of all concerned, notably Brady, who proved himself "an all-round man" in the fullest meaning of the term, the first number of *The Moon* was issued in a fairly creditable manner, and Staunton, despite his fatigue, could not go to bed till he had read over some ten times his *own* paper, which, now that it was an accomplished fact, he took the liveliest interest, and felt the greatest pride in. He indulged in rosy visions of literary success, saw himself a flourishing member of the great "fourth estate," thought vaguely of "the power of the Press," and of himself as a director of that power, which would bring him wealth and influence, though he would, of course, only wield it for good. Ryan, who was in that condition of exhaustion known as "flatness," discounted these rosy visions, and said, shaking his head, "We have an up-hill struggle before us, and it will take us all our time to keep *The Moon* in her orbit, though she has risen all right." But nothing could bring Staunton down from the skies to-night, as he held his crinkling sheet and read his own *Viator* articles.



## CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Staunton left Sellbridge's it became necessary to appoint an accountant in his place, and Mr. Whitegate's choice fell on Robert Herman, one of the clerks.

Herman, who was of a totally different type to Staunton, was one of those old-young men whom the elders of commerce—living only in the present, and forgetting that they were ever young—highly approve, and whom the juniors, to whom he is held up as a pattern, detest most cordially. He was perpetually at work, and was far more in his element when seated at a desk than anywhere else. When he went to get his hair cut, the barber frequently blunted his scissors on the pen which reposed perpetually on the customer's ear, while Herman's cuffs were disfigured with pencilled memoranda within a few hours of being put on. Eight o'clock in the morning saw him—his coat tails flying, his umbrella upraised—pursuing the tram car which would take him to business, and by eight thirty

he would already be inky and happy. Like Staunton, he was an Englishman, but a warehouse Englishman, brought up from quite an early age in an atmosphere of gas, ledgers, and figures. Never had he, like the former, carried an eight pound gun over many a mile of breezy moor land, "opened his shoulders" to a half-volley at cricket, experienced the delight of "coming through a loose scrimmage" with the ball at his toe at foot-ball, torn round a track with his "nose on the tyre" of a bicycle, the wind humming in the spokes, the wildly hopeful local mob yelling with excitement, and the most famous "scorcher" in England just eighteen inches behind, his lips drawn back, his teeth clenched, his spine like a bent bow, "laying on" every ounce he had in him to make up those eighteen inches, in the twenty yards that must be passed before the tape line can be reached.

No ; Fate had so ordered his circumstances that he had been obliged to begin working for a living early, but still he could have got *some* play had he wished, but he evinced no liking for it, and apparently found in the counting-house and office his most congenial surroundings. He had been many years in Australia, but knew the towns only, and could not have distinguished a wallaby from a wombat, or a white gum from a wattle. He could, however, add up three cash columns in his head, calculate  $3\frac{3}{4}$  per cent. discount on £39 13  $3\frac{3}{4}$  in a moment of time, and remember all

the firms that had "gone bung" in the Colony during five years; the last being an almost super-human example of memory. Successful trading was to him the goal, the summit, of human ambition, and all the train of scheming and plotting, and lying, and cheating, that inevitably follows trading, he did not heed; did not, in fact, recognize.

Like many men of his muscularly inactive type, he had married when very young, and his wife—who, like Miss Williams, was a "nitive"—seemed determined to prove the falsity of the assertion (which has been made) that Australian women are not adapted for maternity, for she obeyed the Scriptural injunction so thoroughly, that she was generally referred to in Stanley as "the lady with the babies." The phrase fitted the case, for she usually appeared in public wheeling a perambulator, under the head of which lay a sleeping, feeding, or howling baby, while at the foot of the conveyance was seated the young lady, or gentleman, who had recently suffered the injury known as "having the nose put out of joint" at the hands of the latest arrival. Clinging to her skirts, and tapering off into the distance—ascending as they receded, like a mountain range viewed from a plain—were the earlier off shoots of the House of Herman.

The literal "House of Herman" was a weather-board cottage, containing five small rooms, and this abode of wedded bliss Braefenfell, the lawyer, who

lived next door, had dubbed "The Howleries," from the volume of sound which constantly emerged from it. All the notes of dawning and growing intelligence were there, from the softly gurgled vowel sounds of the youngest, to the highly-pitched threat, "I'll tell pa when he comes from taan," of the eldest. A philologist could have identified every intermediate note, for the varied and numerous sounds gave expression to every primitive passion, or feeling—love, hate, pain, contentment, desire for food, etc., etc. Braefenfell, who worked hard in his office hours, took life easy when at home, and had been much given to reclining in a hammock on his verandah, smoking a long cherry wood pipe, prior to the arrival of the Hermans's next door; but after that event he reclined no longer, but walked up and down, fuming, and uttering remarks that did not seem strictly legal in tone, though they undoubtedly partook of the nature of an oath. He was finally obliged to spend fifty pounds in building a high fence, and removing the verandah to the other side of the house; but he said, philosophically, "Fifty pounds is not a high price to pay for one's reason."

Tuns of milk and tons of bread were delivered at "The Howleries" during the Herman occupation, and as no other food was observed to be taken in there, it was conjectured by the neighbors that Herman and his wife, owing to force of circumstances, had been obliged to "adapt themselves to their environment"—to adopt

the language of the evolutionists—and return to the simple diet of their childhood. Herman certainly looked as if he were fed on bread and milk, for he possessed pale, soft features, almost colorless hair, and flabby, nerveless hands.

Munks, who would have found existence dull if he had not someone to torment, saw clearly that the new accountant was “made for him,” so to speak, and foreseeing that he would not have the courage to turn as Staunton had done, anticipated a really pleasant time for himself. He was not disappointed, for Herman soon learned to tremble when he met the sub-manager’s eye, and to jump almost off his stool when Munks shouted at him, as he constantly did. He could not breathe freely when his tormentor was near him, and often became so nervous that he entered amounts to the credit of Brown, Jones, Robinson or Smith that ought to have gone to their debit, and thus gave Munks a fine chance for bullying, of which he was not slow to avail himself. “I never saw anythin’ like it,” he would say, thumping the ledger with his fist till the ink bottles, and the wretched accountant, jumped. “Forty-three pound nine and tuppence entered in favor of Bungster for that dishonored bill of his. So help me, if this goes on, Sellbridge & Co. will be in the debt of all the district instead of things bein’ t’other way. That sort of book-keeping would break the bloomin’ Bank of England, let alone us.”

"It was a simple error," poor Herman would mutter in his trepidation.

"A simple error ! A compound error, you mean, an' one that spells ruin if it is often repeated. In my opinion a man who makes that kind of error ain't worth a pound a month." And Munks would blow his nose loudly and resentfully, while his victim essayed to go on with his work.

This kind of thing went on day in, day out, for weeks, till, good as his pay was, Herman would have given his place up but for his domestic circumstances, which closed around him like a wall of stone, and deprived him of his freedom as surely as if he were in Pentridge. His nose was on the grindstone, as is that of every man with a large family and no money, and there was only one method by which he could elude the rasping instrument, and that was by dropping under it into the grave. Munks, of course, was well aware of this, and it afforded him much inward satisfaction to reflect on Herman's plight, should the latter in a rash moment resign his position ; and, feeling that he had him safe, he worried the luckless man with impunity and without stint. After a certain time Herman began to get used to Munk's persecution, and the latter tiring of the accountant's impassivity and non-resistance, hinted to Whitegate one day that a change might be desirable.

The manager was sitting in his office at the time

reading a paper which bore the impression "*The Moon*, No. 1" on its foresheet, and raising his eyes from the paper for a moment, he said, "You had better make no changes at present, Munks," and the latter, knowing from experience that Whitegate "never spoke twice," pursued the subject no further. Mr. Whitegate continued to read the paper until he had mastered all its contents, and then turning back read the leading article again. He then scanned the imprint, which merely set forth that the paper was "Printed by Thomas Brady for the Proprietors, and published by them at No. 48 Long-street, Stanley." Laying down the sheet, Mr. Whitegate reflected for a moment, and then putting on his hat, went out into the town, where he made half-a-dozen calls, returning to the office in an hour, calm and apparently unheated, although the shade temperature must have been 94 degrees, and he had covered a good deal of ground. No flush was on his face, no dust on his attire, and to perspiring Mr. Cropley, the farmer who was shown into his office a moment later, he seemed like a pillar of ice.

"Good day, Mr. Cropley," said the manager in his clear, incisive tones, as he surveyed the embarrassed man before him. "What can I do for you?" The farmer mopped his heated brow with his handkerchief, and stammered, "Well, Mr. Whitegate, that—that interest I—I find I can't meet it again, so I called to see if you would give me a little more time."

“I fear I cannot do that ; we have already extended your time twice, and it is quite beyond my power to do so again. Possibly, however, the Land Mortgage Co. might be able to give you some assistance,” and then dismissing the farmer, who went dejectedly forth, the manager pressed a button, which rang a bell in Munk’s room. When the sub-manager entered, Mr. Whitegate said to him, “ Ring up the Land Mortgage Co., and tell them Cropley is going to see them, and to act as directed.”

A month or two later Mr. Cropley was sold up, and the lands on which he had toiled for fifteen years knew his burly figure no more. He was hard-working and honest, but had merely been a fly to the financial spider, and when squeezed dry had been removed, and the net cleared for fresh flies.



## CHAPTER VIII.

THE sun is sinking in the Pacific, but yet gives off an intolerable glare that pains and irritates the eyes, and from which there will be no relief until the orb is actually below the horizon, for Melbourne has no sheltering hills, Southward or Westward, to give her one hour's blessed twilight. All day the fierce sun scorches her, and in the evening the citizen who goes West along Collins-street has to face the level rays which so dazzles his vision that he can scarce recognise a passing acquaintance, whilst if he goes East his shadow is projected to an incredible distance in front, and gives him cause to wonder if he really has those sloping shoulders and knock knees, or if the image is a distorted one.

It has been an oppressively hot day, the shade temperature having risen to 106 degrees at noon, and most of the figures in the street show lassitude and weariness as they press on, eager to leave the heated

city. From Princes' Bridge and Flinders-street train after train rushes forth, crammed with passengers, while trams with jangling bells roll smoothly off to the cooler suburbs. Scarcely anyone remains behind who is free to leave, and soon the streets, which all day were black with restless crowds, are comparatively deserted. The ringing of bells and rush of lifts in the great sky-scraping buildings cease, a few belated passengers run to trains or tram cars, and quiet settles down on the city proper, while life returns to the distant suburbs.

Noting all this movement with an interested eye, as she walks from street to street, is a woman who has looked upon many cities, but who, four years ago, thought this must be the most wonderful of all.

"It is wonderful in its way," she now reflects, "for only so recently as 1835 was it founded, and when the gold discovery took place in 1851 its population only numbered ten thousand. Now it is not far short of half-a-million souls. Many of the buildings are of colossal size, and the streets are well paved, wide, and beautifully clean." Pausing in Collins-street, she thinks of other streets—Northumberland Avenue, New Oxford-street, Broadway, Sackville-street, Friedrichstrasse, La Cannebiere—which she has seen, and she cannot but acknowledge that, though yet irregularly built, Collins-street—every advantage and disadvantage considered—would not suffer *very* much by comparison with any of

them. In fact, Melbourne, as a whole, with its fine buildings, wide streets, luxuriant public gardens, vast extent, and total absence of slums, would, she thinks, compare favorably with most of the cities she had seen, though, of course, Paris, and one or two others, would out-distance her completely. All the material advantages of civilisation are here, she knows—fine buildings, beautiful streets, railways, tramways, telephones, electric lights, splendid hotels, theatres, and what not—all acquired within fifty years, and the people who own these things rest satisfied that they have performed wonders.

With such thoughts as these passing through her mind, the woman walked along Swanston-street, and standing for a while on Prince's Bridge, looked down on the sullen Yarra, flowing silently to the sea. Black and uninviting were its waters, yet how many had come to them for relief from the selfish struggles and vices of the city, where men pressed forward so eagerly in the race for gold. How many heated brains have been cooled for ever in that black current! And this in fifty years, and in "a new and happy land," as the well-considered rhyme of forty years ago termed distant countries, which its writer had never visited.

She presently returned into Flinders-street, and walked through the Fitzroy Gardens, with their fine trees, tasteful flower-beds and broad walks, the latter ornamented with plaster replicas of most of the Grecian

Divinities, though Venus is most often reproduced, and is undoubtedly the presiding deity of the place. Leaving the gardens, she went to a house in Grey-street, East Melbourne, and knocking at the door, inquired of the servant who appeared if Mr. Laughton lived there? The girl answered "Yes," and showed the visitor into the drawing-room, where she sat for some minutes, when a young man, wearing spectacles, entered, and bowing to her in an inquiring and embarrassed manner, said, "You wish to see me?" The visitor was sitting with her back to the light, and he was near-sighted, so that all he could discern was that she was young, well dressed, and apparently good-looking. "So you do not know me?" she said.

"I do not—I am not aware that I do," he stammered, embarrassed. And then, as she rose and advanced towards him, he exclaimed, "Good heavens! It is Edith."

"Yes," she replied, with a curious expression about the corners of her mouth.

"And Ernest—is he here, too?"

"No."

"You are alone, then?"

"Yes."

"The dog; he has deserted you?"

"No, not exactly that; we parted."

"And did he—did he——" the speaker hesitated.

"Marry me?"

"Yes. I was going to ask that."

"No."

"I knew he wouldn't ; I warned you. The wretch—the ——"

"Softly, softly, Matthew," she said, with a little laugh at his vehemence. "He would have done so, but I declined."

"You declined?" with a stare of surprise.

"Yes," she said, laughing again at his look of astonishment. "I found that we did not suit each other in any one particular, and so we parted."

"But people—the world——" he began, when she cut him short with a decisive "Pshaw ! why should I have done a foolish and wrong thing to please the world ? We need say no more about it, Matt. All that is done with for ever."

"And what are you going to do now?" he asked, gazing at her with an expression of bewilderment.

"I am first of all going to see my own people—what next I don't know."

"Have you left England for good, then?"

"I cannot say whether 'for good' or not, but I have left it temporarily, and came out to Australia, partly because I felt some impulse urging me to do so, and partly because I had such a bad attack of influenza in November, that the doctor strongly advised me to spend at least a year in a warm climate."

"And your means ? Are you comfortably off ?

Did Ernest—— ?”

“I took nothing from him, and have been maintaining myself for two years. But recently a kind friend died and left me all she possessed—a sum of about £2,000, which suffices for all my needs. And now, to leave my affairs, what are *you* doing, Matt?”

“Well, I am not in employment, to commence with.”

“You are not idle, notwithstanding, I fancy. I remember the way you used to work in London.”

“I am still pegging away at the old experiments. I have been in this house for over two years—ever since I came out, in fact—and I have an exact reproduction of the old lab. fitted up in a shed in the garden.”

“And how do you manage for funds?”

He pulled a wry face. “Well, that is the trouble,” he replied. “I only get my one hundred a year from the estate, you know, and Ernest has never sent me a pound or written me a line since that night. You remember?”

“Yes. I remember.”

“I could have forgiven him for telling me to swallow some of my own chemicals and go to the devil quicker than I would get there by natural means, though it wasn’t a very kind thing to say to an only brother, well on in consumption, was it?”

“You know what I thought about it, and said, at the time?”

"I do. And I remember his telling you to go to the devil, too. It was that and his treatment of you that really riled me, and made me speak to him as I did."

"And he has never sent you any money?"

"Not a shilling. I should have sent it back if he had. I left the very day after the row, but I had delayed in England too long, and very nearly found a grave in the Red Sea, as so many other invalids have done; but I pulled through, and have got on wonderfully here."

"I heard of your splendid recovery."

"From whom?"

"Mr. James, the solicitor."

"And I suppose he gave you my address. I am delighted that you have come to see me. You will stay and have some tea with me, will you not?"

"Most willingly. I have been walking about for some hours in the sweltering heat, and feel quite exhausted."

Beaming with pleasure, he led her into another room, where the table was set for tea, and here, after the meal was concluded, they sat talking for some hours, and he told her of his experiments, and declared that he was on the verge of a discovery that would cause the world to ring, and make his fortune at the same time. Further, he told her that he would not have been able to live and carry on expensive experiments on £100 a year, and said that all his labors would have

been wasted but for the assistance of an old school-fellow and right good friend, one Robert Ryan, who had helped him with money on many occasions.

She was interested to hear of his doings, and later on, in reply to his questions, gave him some particulars of her life and work in London, and he, listening and observing, realised that she was an exceptionally strong and clear-headed woman, and at the same time surprisingly young looking. It was late when they parted at the door of the Grand Hotel, whence next morning she drove to Spencer-street, and took a ticket to Stanley.



## CHAPTER IX.

THE first issue of *The Moon* proved an undoubted success in a commercial sense, for the paper was vigorously circulated by the newsvendors and their boys, who were glad to have a third journal wherewith to turn an honest penny.

By eight o'clock in the evening three editions had been exhausted, and Brady had to print a few extra copies for late comers, and the office files. The Melbourne Grain Company had a large advertisement in the issue. The District Bank took four inches over the leader. Braefenfell inserted two or three announcements of money to lend on mortgage, and on the strength of these orders Wilks secured some dozens of others from various retailers, so that the first issue presented a business-like appearance in the advertisement section—a fact that would have more weight with the citizens of Stanley than columns of the most brilliant literary matter ever put into type.

Staunton was so pleased with the paper that he slept with it under his pillow, and re-read it for the eleventh time immediately on waking. He was much hurt when Ryan, who wanted to discuss some subject, said, "For goodness sake drop that confounded rag, and listen to me."

"Confounded rag, indeed," thought Staunton, indignantly, and feeling that had anyone else but his partner in the concern applied such a term to the new instrument for the regeneration of mankind, he would have been very much inclined to quarrel with him.

Opposition was to be expected, of course, and the morning *Star* appeared with an ironical article, headed, "The rising of *The Moon*, a brief and revolutionary episode," in which "the early setting of the Satellite" was predicted. The *Sun*, by its "weighty silence," showed that it was not *for* the new journal, and an anonymous letter signed "Accountant," and asking for "the position of liquidator when the important firm owning *The Moon* is wound up," was received about mid-day, to the great annoyance of Staunton, who, against the advice of Ryan, attempted to trace the sender through the post-office.

His attempt proved futile, and he was returning to the office when he was accosted by the frank and genial Mr. Forrester, who grasped him by the hand with a cordiality that could not have been assumed (by a less accomplished actor), and said, "How do you do, Mr.

Staunton?" I am pleased to meet you again, though you *will* make a stranger of yourself. You never come up to Tatoora now-a-days."

"I did call some weeks ago," said Staunton, rather coldly, and unable for the life of him to reciprocate the other's cordiality, as he remembered their last meeting.

"Of course, of course! I recollect now. I heard you had been up. You met young Townsend, my daughter's future husband—nice, bright young fellow, isn't he?"

"Very," answered Staunton, untruthfully.

"I should like you to see more of him, and as he is coming to dinner to-morrow evening, perhaps you will join us?"

"Well, I am very busy just now, Mr. Forrester, and——"

"Busy! To be sure, I might have known. You are connected with *The Moon*, of course? Good name, that—sort of a dig at the *Sun* and *Star*. You are on the staff, I suppose?"—this in a tone of conventional inquiry which threw Staunton off his guard, and he was about to reply that he was part proprietor of the paper, when Ryan, coming suddenly from the office, bowed to Mr. Forrester, whom he knew slightly, and drawing his arm through Staunton's, said, "You are forgetting our appointment. Come along, or we shall be late," and as they walked away he continued, "I forgot to tell you, Staunton, that you cannot be too

careful as to whom you confide in at present. You will find very little disinterested friendship, and he who is not for us is against us. Now, this man, Forrester, is constitutionally given to sitting on a rail, and trying to keep sweet with everybody, but in this case there is absolutely no doubt as to where his interests lie."

"With Sellbridge's, of course?"

"Yes; and it therefore needs little sense on our part to know that he is against us, though he will endeavor to keep friendly to the very last, and for that reason he requires to be all the more carefully guarded against. That was why I interrupted your conversation just now. I feared that he might be trying to pump you."

"That is exactly what he was attempting to do; but I shall be very careful in future."

During the day several people called at the office, some with intentions similar to Mr. Forrester's, others actuated by mere curiosity, and a few to offer genuine congratulations—amongst the latter being Hardy and Braefenfell.

The second number of the paper was prepared and issued without mishap, and had an excellent sale. Some of *Liator's* remarks on sporting subjects, one or two snappily-written locals of Wilkes', and a pungent sub-leader by Ryan on a burning local topic, attracted a good deal of favorable attention. For the third issue Wilkes secured a number of new advertisements, and "wrote up" the local boot factory (perpetrating thirty-

eight untruths in the course of a single article), for which perjury he received ten pounds. Staunton also obtained an advertisement from the leading cricket club. Several complimentary letters were printed, a controversy on a sporting point was raised in the *Viator* column, and altogether the paper began to present an appearance of prosperity, and in consequence, Ryan, who always looked a good distance ahead, expected to hear of, or from, the opposition before long.

When, therefore, Hardy, the bank manager, sent for him one afternoon, he was not surprised by a communication made in the following words, "Well, Ryan, something has been done by your 'friends' already, for not an hour ago I received a letter from the head office in Melbourne, asking me if I had made full inquiries concerning Staunton and yourself, instructing me to see that the security was unimpeachable, and on no account to advance any further sums without the sanction of the directors."

"That looks like a move," said Ryan. "What will you reply?"

"I was just completing my letter when you came in, and in it I say that the advance was guaranteed by Mr. Braefenfell, who is good for £50,000; that Messrs. Staunton and Ryan are of irreproachable character; that I look upon the advance as one of the safest we have made; and, finally, I hint that I am not unaware of certain influences at work against our

customers, whom I intend to help, so far as I legitimately can."

"Bravo! Hardy, you have done us a good turn."

"Oh! not much. I would do more than that if I could, for I take an interest in you, and, moreover, have no love for that Sellbridge crowd, who run everything to their own advantage, and do not give others a chance in life. They are very powerful, and you had better not give them an opportunity to take you unawares."

"I shall be on my guard," replied Ryan, and thanking Hardy, he withdrew.

Next day Wilkes came in, looking very blank and depressed, and, noting this, Ryan asked, "What is the matter, Wilkes."

"I have done no business at all to-day, though I called on forty people if I called on one."

"How were you received?"

"Badly. In some instances with a sneering remark on the paper, in others with a refusal so short as to be offensive, though I never pretended to notice that, having been in the canvassing business too long to lose my temper."

"Did any of them treat you in what you would call an insulting manner?"

"Only one—Perkins."

"Ah! Perkins. Then the wind is beginning to rise. Well, Mr. Wilkes, you did your best, and we must only

keep on trying. Here is a list of people from whom you may get orders to-morrow." While Wilkes was perusing the list of names, Brady entered, and scratching his nose with his glasses in a perplexed manner, said, " Mr. Ryan, three or four news vendors in the city and suburbs have sent in to say that they will not take the paper again." To Brady's surprise, Ryan answered very calmly, " Very well ; send it to those who *will* take it, and ask them to circulate it freely in the districts usually served by those who have refused." Staunton heard the ill news with dismay, and said, " We shall be ruined."

" Not at all," said Ryan. " This is only the commencement of the opposition, about which you now see I made no mistake, and we have done nothing yet. There are two sides to a fight," he continued, with a gleam in his dark eyes.

" What will you do ? "

" Wait a few days till we discover the quarter from which the opposition comes, and then strike back with all our strength."

" It can only come from one quarter—Sellbridge's."

" I do not think they will appear as yet. Perkins, or one of the other papers as their skirmishers, are more likely, I should say."

Ryan's surmise proved correct, for next morning the *Star* had a veiled article dealing with " the loose system which allows people to commence business

enterprises without capital, experience, or anything, in fact, than the quality known correctly as effrontery, vulgarly as 'cheek,' " and going on to state that " the sooner such enterprises arrive at their deserved and certain goal—the Bankruptcy Court—the better for the community."

That afternoon Wilkes was refused an advertisement order by a shopkeeper in the town, who had previously given a verbal promise, and Ryan, who knew the man, and believed him to be friendly, suspected outside influence at once, and proceeded to interview the retailer himself. Entering the shop, he was greeted by the proprietor, who looked a little sheepish as he met the visitor's eye. " Good-day, Mr. Sams," said Ryan. " I have called to endeavor to persuade you into altering your mind concerning that advertisement you promised Mr. Wilkes."

" I—I can't give the order now, Mr. Ryan."

" But Wilkes said you promised."

" Well, I did—verbally. Verbally, you know."

" Will you, then, repudiate a promise merely because it was verbal ? I have known you for some years, and always found that your word was to be relied on."

" So it is, so it is, but—but in this case I am not—not a free agent."

" Now look here, Mr. Sams, I am a plain-dealing man, and hate shilly-shallying and fencing with things. I give you my promise that the information



will go no further. Now *who* was it that interfered with you ? I believe I know, and merely want my suspicions confirmed."

Sams looked at him doubtfully, hesitated, shook his head, and seemed inclined to retreat, and thus end the interview, when Ryan bending over, and sinking his voice to a whisper, said, "Was it Perkins ?" "Yes," said the shopkeeper, too much surprised to think of parrying the question. "You see I deal there and owe them a good bit. Mr. Perkins came in yesterday, and in the course of conversation referred to your paper, and said he did not approve of it, or of the people who were running it. I disagreed with this, but he would not listen to me, and said very pointedly, 'I should not like to hear of any customers of ours supporting it.' After that, what could I do but refuse your man when he called ?"

"I do not blame you, Mr. Sams, you must look after yourself. I will respect your confidence. Good-day, and many thanks."

"So Mr. Perkins," thought Ryan, as he walked back, "you are our first opponent, but only a clumsy one. You show your hand much too plainly, and it will be a surprise to me if we cannot euchre you, at any rate." As time went on, the opposition to *The Moon* became more and more apparent. Wilkes and Staunton could not obtain advertisements, fully half the news-vendors refused to take the paper, and the circulation

fell off considerably. The only hopeful signs were one or two advertisements from patent medicine agents and others in Melbourne, an increased circulation in the country beyond the Stanley sphere of influence, and a certain interest in the paper evinced by the younger section of the local public. These were financially of little help, however, and Staunton began to feel very despondent as the returns declined, and remarked one evening to Ryan, with a poor attempt at a joke, "*The Moon* has not been long in the heavens before clouds have commenced to obscure her face."

"Well, a storm generally leaves the sky pretty clear after it has passed," remarked Ryan, who had recently sent off a number of letters, and had been very busy making notes and writing for some days past; "and unless I am much mistaken, a storm is about to break that will clear *one* cloud—if no more—from the face of *our* luminary."

## CHAPTER X.

MR. COPPLESTONE, the solicitor, was amongst those who, from the first, expressed a kindly interest in Messrs. Staunton and Ryan's new venture, and he called several times at the office to ask how affairs were progressing, and to make some depreciatory remark about the *Sun* and *Star*, which "totally lacked principle," he said. "You are producing a journal that is a credit to the town," he remarked to the partners, on the occasion of his last visit, "and you deserve great credit, but you must not work too hard. Young men need relaxation more than old ones, and should not wrap themselves up too much in their business." This proved a preamble to an invitation to "a little dance—an informal affair—just a few young people." Staunton, before replying, looked doubtfully at Ryan, who had never to his knowledge accepted an invitation to any kind of social entertainment, but to his surprise the saturnine Irishman replied with a ready affirmative

on this occasion, and seemed quite grateful to Mr. Copplestone for asking him. Staunton could not help wondering what sort of figure his gloomy partner would make amongst a crowd of pleasure-seeking, frivolous people, and had grave doubts as to whether Ryan would exhibit a sufficiency of *ton* in his attire. He was soon satisfied on this latter point, for the editor got himself up so faultlessly that he threw his partner completely into the shade, and caused Miss Williams to remark, "Gricious, Mr. Ryan, you do look a toff! You'll brike all the ladies' hearts to-night."

"You look very like a Spanish nobleman, Ryan, or a highwayman in disguise—a sort of dashing Captain Starlight," commented Staunton, as he surveyed his partner approvingly.

"Thank you, but as it happens I am neither, but a modern Irishman, with a surly disposition, which imparts a Mephistophelian expression to my otherwise perfect features. You would be all right yourself, Staunton, only you look so beastly English."

"I like that, upon my word. Why, the English are the handsomest race on earth."

"Of course; and the most mannerly. But we will have a lady's opinion on the subject of appearance. Miss Williams, do you think the English the handsomest people on earth?"

"N-e-a-ow" (no)—with a perfect snarl of negation.  
"They are too fat."

"Then whom do you consider the handsomest?"

"The Austrilians, of course."

"You hear, Mr. Staunton?"

"I hear; and to my dying day, Miss Williams, I shall not forget that you said I was too fat. Is it for this that I laboured to grow lucerne for the kyiow—?"

"The cow won't grow very fat if she waits for your lucerne," interrupted Ryan. "We had better go now, or we shall be late, which would not be good form on the part of men from *The Moon*."

"He is attempting to joke now," muttered Staunton, "and must be losing his reason. He'll be getting drunk next, or married, or some other frightful thing."

Mr. Copplestone's abode was a large villa, standing in about five acres of ground, which had been allowed to retain some traces of the original bush. Several fine red gums, ten or twelve feet in girth, stood here and there, amidst imported shrubs and ornamental trees, while in one corner a patch of scrub or bush undergrowth remained in its original state, save that it had been slightly thinned out, and a path or two cut through it.

It had been a labor of love with the owner to create a comfortable and attractive home amidst rough surroundings; and he had succeeded admirably, for the villa, with its large rooms, wide verandahs, and well-kept grounds, would have satisfied the taste of the most exacting.

Mr Copplestone derived immense pleasure from exhibiting the beauties of his place to visitors. On this occasion, when Staunton and Ryan arrived, he was showing to a party of early arrivals some botanical curiosity which "had never before been grown further South than latitude 20." Having added the two editors to his audience, and being anxious to secure a notice in the paper for his phenomenon, he commenced a lecture, which would have continued for an hour, only that the scraping of fiddles announced that dancing had commenced, and banished the naturalist in favor of the host.

Entering the large, well-lighted room, in which a dozen couples were whirling round to the strains of a waltz, Staunton found himself beside Miss Copplestone, and with her for his partner, joined the dancers, quite forgetful of Ryan, whom he left standing in the doorway. The evening was warm, though the season was now Autumn (or what is called Autumn—really the commencement of the rainy season), and after the dance was over, Staunton and his partner, with several other couples, strolled into the garden. After a considerable period of abstention from female society, it was pleasant to stroll amidst shrubs and flower beds in that warm, scent-laden atmosphere, with an attractive member of the other sex ; to note the sheen of white dresses on the lawns and verandahs, and to hear the hum of cheerful voices, and ripple of

musical laughter. "Better this than a stuffy English tea room, or hot-air-heated conservatory," he thought, as he walked on, observing incidentally that his companion's white glove, as it lay on his black sleeve, was very shapely. She was undeniably fair; her dress of filmy white became her exceedingly, and her conversation was frank and interesting; so much so, indeed, that Staunton forgot all about the next dance, and was only reminded of it by the arrival of Mr. Jack Forrester in search of his partner.

"My waltz, Miss Copplestone," he said, as he came up. "I am sorry to take you away from Mr. Staunton" (with a grin that made them both look awkward, they scarce knew why), "but the routine is not to be avoided on these occasions, you know. I should have been here sooner, only that I fell over a wheelbarrow, which some lunatic left in one of the walks."

"Oh! Mr. Forrester, that was papa's wheelbarrow full of assorted roots. I hope you did not upset it?"

"Indeed I did; and if your father can sort out those roots he'll be clever. I don't mean to apologise to him either, for any man who leaves a wheelbarrow in the middle of a walk deserves no sympathy. I'm always tripping over 'the old man's' spades, and falling into his flower beds, but I never apologise—oh, no." And muttering something further about "old idiots," Mr. Forrester walked off with his partner, leaving Staunton to infer that his fall over the wheelbarrow had slightly

ruffled his temper. On re-entering the house, the first person Staunton observed was Ryan, whirling round in excellent time with a lady whom he (Staunton) did not recognise. "That fellow is a fraud," he thought, as he watched the easy grace with which his unsocial friend danced, steering, and reversing occasionally, to avoid a jamb, with consummate skill. Staunton next became aware that Miss Mary Forrester was observing him with a look of expectancy in her pinky eyes, and knowing that a dance with her was inevitable, he advanced gallantly, and bowing in response to her curt nod of recognition, led her off, and was soon moving round the room with destructive effects. His partner would not steer ; she simply went through the crowd and brushed aside opposition like so much dust. Having knocked Jack Forrester into the fire-place, and heard him mutter something that in his editorial capacity he would have had to mark "unfit for publication," thrown Mr. Copplestone, who was amiably ambling about the room, into the arms of a stout dowager, and cannoned even the wary Ryan into a corner, Staunton felt that he had done sufficient for duty, and persuaded his partner to relinquish dancing, and promenade. Conversation was not quite so easy this time as last, and his companion saying nothing, he was at a loss to find a subject likely to interest her. Presently, however, he said, "This is a pretty garden. Don't you think so?"



"Yes," said Miss Mary.

"I suppose you like a garden?"

"No, not much."

"What is your pet weakness, then?"

"My what?"

"What have you the greatest liking for?"

"I don't know."

"Do you like pictures?"

"Pretty well."

"Music?"

"Oh, yes."

"Instrumental or vocal, or both?"

"No."

"Well, there is one thing *I* should like," thought Staunton, "and that is something to drink;" but he said nothing, and his companion being quite content to remain silent, they walked on mutely till the next dance commenced, when, as they were returning to the house, Miss Mary said suddenly, "My sister's here."

"I know that," said Staunton, "I saw her."

"Oh, I don't mean Emily; I mean——" but just when, for the first time since he had known her, Staunton was curious to hear what she had to say, she was claimed for the dance and led off, and at the same moment a voice said in Staunton's ear, "Awf'ly waum, isn't it? Let's go and get some claret cup." The speaker was Mr. Townsend, and as his words recalled

to Staunton's mind the fact that he was very thirsty, he willingly accompanied the tall chappie to the dining room, where, near the sideboard, were grouped a number of youths, listening with interest to Mr. Jack Forrester, who had been retailing the incident of his fall over Mr. Copplestone's wheelbarrow with vigorous parenthetical remarks on "old market gardeners." "They're all alike," he said, "and the worst of it is you can't teach 'em anything. Now, 'the old man' (he always came back to the subject of his father sooner or later) thinks he knows more about gardening than any man in Australia, but only last winter a fellow that anyone with an eye in his head could have told was a spieler, stuck him with about two pounds of seed at a sovereign the pound. It was 'The New American Violet Seed,' the spieler said, and 'the only lot ever introduced into Australia.' This caught 'the old man' like sugar catches a fly, and he bought the lot. I made a remark or two in my usual mild way, but he rounded on me in a minute, and asked what the deuce I knew about seed or anything else, so I dried up, and let him go on his own way. He sowed the seed in every bed in the garden, and by gum, I believe he'd have sown it on the roof of the house, only he had doubts of its being able to take root there. He went out every day to see if the plants were coming up, but they were slow in starting, so he said they 'required water,' and emptied every tank in the place on them, till there wasn't a

drop left for cooking purposes, and I had to go down town for a wash. If the things had been violets they would have been drowned by this treatment, but they weren't—oh ! no—and the watering agreed with them so well that they came up thick, and the whole bally garden was green with young Swedish turnips. Oh ! he's a smart one, 'the old man.' ” concluded Mr. Forrester, amidst loud laughter.

“ They know a lot, the old ones,” remarked another youth. “ My dad now won't have a colonial about the place, says that they're 'too careless,' 'lack the earnestness of the Old Country men,' and half-a-dozen other things. Any dead-beat new chum is sure to find a job if he comes our way, and they all know it. We generally have three or four loafers sleeping in the stable and eating our tucker, in return for the 'work' they do. Well, one day dad gave one of these chaps two packets of seed, and said, 'This packet contains grass seeds, and this carrot seeds. Sow the carrots in the bed you dug by the sod fence, and the grass on the fence.' Off the fellow goes, and in a few weeks' time grass was growing in the garden, and carrots on the fence. Dad's not quite so sweet on new chums now.”

Staunton joined in the laughter occasioned by these anecdotes, and realised that when parents and children are virtually of different nations, agreement between them cannot always be expected.

Returning to the dancing-room with Townsend, he

accompanied the latter to the portion of the room where sat Miss Forrester, languidly fanning herself. She received Staunton more warmly—to be correct, less indifferently—than Townsend, and said to him, with a suggestion of interest, “Who is the ugly man you first came in with?”

“Mr. Ryan. But I should hardly call him ugly.”

“He’s a fright, I think. I asked you about him because he has been talking to my sister for quite a time, and she seems to be greatly interested in his conversation.”

“Miss Mary?”

“No, my sister——” but here Mr. Townsend, who had been fidgeting on his seat, interrupted by saying, “Aw, Emily, you are to give me this daunce, you know.” Miss Forrester rose reluctantly, and Staunton was looking round for Ryan, when he was seized upon by Mrs. Forrester, who had just been deserted by a companion with whom she had been carrying on an animated conversation—a handsomely enamelled lady made up to resemble a woman of thirty. Alas! that the art of “making-up” should, like the influenza, have successfully passed “all the long wash of Australasian Seas.” But such is the case, and it is now as well acclimatised as the sheep, and will doubtless survive long after that useful animal has become extinct.

“I am so pleased to see you, Mr. Staunton,” said Mrs. Forrester. “I hear that you have made quite a

new departure since we saw you last, and have taken to newspaper work. You are associated with that singular-looking gentleman, Mr. Ryan, I believe? Was he ever an actor, by the way?"

"I don't——"

"Because I feel sure I saw someone very like him in 'Paul Jones,' in Melbourne. Do you admire Miss Copplestone?"

"Yes, I think——"

"Do you notice the diamond butterfly in her hair? Well, I heard that her father gave fifty pounds for it in Melbourne; that gown of Mrs. Copplestone's too, cost twenty pounds at Buckley and Nunn's. I know that for a fact, because the last time I was in Melbourne I priced a piece myself. I wonder where the money for?——" But here her listener interrupted in his turn by saying, "Miss Forrester mentioned just now that her sister was here?"

"Yes, my daughter——" but Mrs. Forrester got no further, for parting the crowd as a clipper ship parts the waves, the large Miss Mary bore down on her mother, exclaiming, "Oh! ma, pa has left off cards, and wants us to go home——" But Staunton heard no more, for taking advantage of the interruption, he escaped. Searching for Ryan, he at length found him deep in conversation with Mr. Copplestone, who said, just as Staunton came up, "I should stop if I were you, Ryan, or otherwise it will do you an injury."

Perkins and Munks choose the most public places when making their disparaging remarks concerning you, just as if there were no law of libel in the land. But here is your partner, who has something to say to you. I must leave you, or my guests will think I am neglecting them." When Ryan and Staunton had exchanged a few words, the latter said, "I am curious to know something of the lady who is reported to have been much interested in your conversation?"

"Is it a remarkable fact that a lady should be interested in my conversation?"

"No, but——"

"But what?"

"I am curious, that is all."

"Curiosity in a man is quite inexcusable, and ought not to be gratified; but seeing that it's you, I don't mind telling you. The lady was the lately-arrived Miss—— I beg your pardon Miss Copplestone; I quite forgot that it was our dance," and proffering his arm to the lady, Ryan walked off, leaving Staunton's curiosity still unsatisfied.

It was impossible to keep up dancing continuously in that warm atmosphere, and singing made a pleasant break every half-hour or so. During one of these interludes Staunton was astonished to see Ryan escort a lady to the piano, and placing a piece of music before her, wait while she played the introductory bars.

"Surely he is not going to sing?" he thought, and

was meditating flight, for he did not wish to hear Ryan "make an ass of himself." But before he could move, that individual, in a singularly sweet voice, commenced the well-known song, "My Life for Thee," and, gaining confidence as he proceeded, sang it in a manner that attracted the attention of even garrulous chaperons, and elicited loud applause when he had concluded. Before Staunton had recovered from his surprise, he was astonished again, for Ryan, coming up with the lady who had played his accompaniment, said, "This is the gentleman who was inquiring about you. Allow me to introduce Mr. Staunton—Miss Edith Forrester." "I thought I knew all the family," said Staunton, when he had made his salaam; "but I never had the pleasure of meeting you before," and then he stopped in some little confusion, as a rumour he once heard occurred to him.

"I have been away from Stanley for years, and have not long returned," she said, regarding him with a very clear and steady eye, and, as she spoke, he noted that her accent was different to that of her sisters, and also that in appearance she was unlike them. She was of middle-size, well-proportioned, and graceful, with a broad forehead, rather squarely cut chin, and eyes of a clearness and depth that Staunton never remembered to have seen in a woman before. "A remarkable and interesting looking woman," was his verdict delivered to Ryan as they were walking home.

"Only interesting woman I ever met," said Ryan, laconically, between the puffs of his pipe.

"Ha ! Well, don't say that to other women, or you will make them hate her. But what were you talking about that interested her so much ?"

"Oh, various things, but mostly about the paper, which she was anxious to hear about. She writes herself, I understand."

"A Forrester write !" said Staunton, amazed.

"It seems surprising. But you often see one in a family very different to others."

"Wasn't there some story connected with her ?"

"Probably half-a-dozen. She is the sort of woman who would be likely to provide the crowd with plenty of food for conversation."

"Well, whatever it was, her family, and Stanley society, seem to have forgotten it, or we should not have had an opportunity of meeting her to-night. But here we are at home. Oh ! confound it."

"What's wrong now ?"

"I have forgotten the key, and we shall have to climb in by the window ; for if we wait here till Miss Williams arrays herself in what she considers sufficient garments wherein to appear in male society, dawn will overtake us."

"My dear fellow," said Ryan, as he opened the door, "two heads, especially when the clearer one is an Irishman's, and the weaker one an Englishman's,



are always better than one. *I* did not forget the key."

"No doubt you have been more used to late hours than I," said Staunton, and with this mild retort he went to bed.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE house of a business man is often a sort of adjunct, as it were, to his office or warehouse, and the “dining and wining” of customers, bankers and others, with whom he wishes to stand well, no inconsiderable portion of his yearly duties. Many an important transaction, or arrangement for a substantial cash advance, that would not eventuate in an office or bank parlor, is completed over the walnuts and wine—a fact which does not redound very much to the credit of those concerned. The business men of Stanley were like their brethern elsewhere, and entertained a good deal; but Mr. Whitegate was an exception to this rule, and though he had a fine villa at Tatoora, but rarely attempted to entertain, and was not successful when he did. His was not a character that could unbend and become genial under any influence whatever, and though he recognised the usefulness of the function, he felt unable to avail himself of it. He could not

afford to be completely out of the fashion, though, and so once in a while a labored and unsatisfactory dinner party was given to a few mercantile people and their wives. These so-called "dinner" parties were distinctly hybrid in character. Wines appeared on the table, of course, but claret with the soup, or sherry with the joint, would be offered indifferently, while tea made its appearance in the middle of the meal, and scones and cake were placed side by side with the conventional walnuts and fruits. The wines would be purchased for the occasion (neither Mr. Whitegate nor his wife drinking wine) and after the meal had been concluded the host would produce a packet of some rank compound labelled "tobacco," and a box of "best Havannah" cigars (made in Melbourne) and offer them to his guests. Not smoking himself, he bought these at the nearest tobacconist's, and fondly imagined they were everything that was perfect.

Mrs. Whitegate, who was much younger than her husband, disliked these entertainments as much as he did, and seemed quite content to live in a house which was magnificently upholstered ("furnished" would not be the proper word to use in a case where an order to "supply the necessary furniture for a sixteen-roomed house" had been given to a warehouse), and endeavour to keep her children in order. Her efforts in this latter direction were not crowned with distinguished success, as her practice was to alternately

indulge and scold the children ; to dress them in satins and velvets, feed them on lollies, cakes, fruits, or any indigestible they fancied, and buy them anything they asked for sufficiently often.

Mr. Whitegate never interfered in the domestic concerns. He supplied his wife with plenty of money, a fine house, clothes of the most expensive description—and what more could she want ? Home he endured, but was not at ease there, and was always glad to get back to the office in the morning, for there he was in his true element. The rooms of the villa were crowded and littered with fanciful furniture and nick-nacks of Mrs. Whitegate's buying, and there was not a sofa he could lie on with comfort, if he were so inclined, but he never was, preferring to sit bolt upright in a straight-backed chair.

He never lounged, or put on an old coat, but perpetually kept up his role of neat and formal—not to say stiff—city man. Whether he continued this when absolutely alone cannot be stated for certain, but the presumption is that he did. In fact, he could not have unbent if he tried.

He did not read anything except the local papers, and in consequence there were no books in the house other than a few handsomely bound volumes sent to complete the furnishing of the book-cases ; and as Mrs. Whitegate did not affect even the *Family Herald* or *Illustrated Australian News*, the want of literature

to some would have been very apparent, but no one there seemed to notice it.

The time for one of the dreaded dinners came round, and to it were invited the Forresters, Mr. and Mr. Perkins, and one or two other guests. Mr. Townsend was also included, he being a customer of Sellbridge & Co., who had sold him the valuable farm in which he was now sowing his English remittances without obtaining much financial crop in return. The prospect of an evening passed in the company of "the old man," supported by a number of elderly allies and sympathisers, was too much for Mr. Jack Forrester, who preferred to spend his evening at the Literary Club ; but Mrs. Forrester and her three daughters accepted the invitation.

The guests were received in the gorgeous drawing-room by Mr. Whitegate, the lady of the house being engaged in the kitchen, where affairs were in the chaotic state common in houses where entertainments are only occasionally attempted. The cook had already given notice three times in consequence of "bein' axed to get ridy dinner for twelve people, wid a tin-pot range fit for a five-roomed shanty, an' a kelonial oven that burns the skin aff me face, an' laves the mate I'm tryin' to roast as raw as it wor whin it come aff the baste ;" and the housemaid had evinced symptoms of giving way to hysteria, as a result of having twice, in the perturbation of her spirits, placed

a tray, laden with glass and crockery, on portions of the atmosphere, beneath which she erroneously imagined a table to be standing. These difficulties and a severe headache sufficiently occupied Mrs. Whitegate, and the entertainment of the guests prior to dinner being served was necessarily left to her husband. He was faultlessly attired, but somehow his appearance was not so striking in evening dress as in his ordinary costume, though no one noticed this fact except perhaps the second Miss Forrester.

Mr. and Mrs. Perkins, the one in a black frock coat, the other in a red velvet dress, afforded a fine contrast in colors, and suggested the game of *Rouge-et-Noir* when they entered, while Mr. Munks, who was attired in a blue frock coat—fashionable about the year 1860—lent an appearance of antiquity to the scene, and mellowed down its newness, as it were. After an intolerable interval, spent by the elder gentleman in encomiums on the furniture and pictures, and astonished exclamations at their cost, as communicated by Mr. Whitegate, by Mr. Townsend in heroic efforts to stifle portentous yawns, by Miss Forrester in languid conversation with Mrs. Perkins and her mother, by Miss Edith Forrester in a painful awareness of incongruous colors and absence of homeliness in the room, and by Miss Mary in stolid silence, dinner was announced, and the guests paired off to the dining-room.

Soup ought to have been the first dish, but the

range being too small to accommodate the fish-kettle and soup-pot at one time, the latter had been transferred to the fire on the colonial oven, and had, unfortunately, been upset by the cook, over whose slippered foot a small portion of the boiling fluid had gone, with appalling results in the way of language, followed by five notices to leave in as many minutes. Fish then had to take first place, and as this was Murray cod, which only requires boiling, it was fairly satisfactory. Mrs. Whitegate, who had given herself several headaches with a cookery book during the last week, had vainly wished to have *Huiters a la Poulette*, as the book termed them, to follow the fish, and had ordered a small barrel of oysters, but the cook declined point blank to "mess wid any blessed isthyers," so curried rabbit had to be substituted. This dish would have been more successful if there had been more rabbit and less curry powder, but probably because the first-named ingredient was cheap and the latter dear, the cook had been sparing with the meat and generous with the powder—so generous, in fact, that Munks, who had rashly taken a large helping, felt as if "a torchlight procession had gone done his throat," as he whispered to Mr. Perkins, who, feeling sympathetic, passed the wine nearest to hand. This being "sherry," purchased from a local grocer, was not well calculated to cool the irritated membrane, and Munks, after drinking it, felt as if he had poured kerosene on the torches.

The solid joints were roast sirloin of beef and boiled leg of mutton. The former had been entrusted to the colonial oven, which had browned it nicely on the outside, but left the interior absolutely raw, and the leg of mutton therefore proved the *piece de resistance*, and "saved them from starvation," as Townsend afterwards remarked to his fiancée. An apple pie and boiled ginger pudding were the sweets, and again the baked dish failed, for the paste had the weight and solidity of a tile, and the sliced apples, protected by this impervious roof, lay in all their virgin whiteness and hardness within. The pudding was excellent, however, and was enjoyed by everyone, except Munks, who had had "enough of hot things for one evening." Fruit, nuts, cheese, scones, bread and butter, sweet cake, and tea, were now placed on the table in great and terrible profusion and confusion, to the dismay of Mr. Townsend, who, however, stuck tenaciously to the safe line of raisins and claret.

The departure of the ladies was followed by the production of the alleged tobacco and Melbourne cigars by Mr. Whitegate, but most of the smokers appeared to have provided themselves with tobacco and cigars of their own. The topics of conversation now broached were the price of wool, the mortgageable value of certain freeholds, the prospects of the new railway, which the member for West Stanley was trying to "get out of the Government," the "smart-



ness" of the said member, the rumour of Smithson and Son's insolvency; almost all subjects relating to money, or the getting of money. Townsend was not a brilliant conversationalist at any time, but on the present occasion he was dumb, from inability to discuss the subjects chosen, and, seeing this, Mr. Forrester whispered, "Never mind us old fogies, Townsend. You join the ladies." Nothing loth, the young man retired to the drawing-room, leaving the others free to discuss matters in which they were most interested.

Meanwhile, in the drawing-room, Mrs. Whitegate had been placing her children on show, and, so far as appearance went, they certainly merited inspection, for both boys and girls were clad in blue, red, or green velvet, while their hair was curled and "frizzed" and hung down their backs to a surprising length. They had been conducted to the door by their nurse, and entered the room with a half bold, half shy air, which did not add to their attractiveness. For some minutes they were so occupied in staring at the guests, that they paid no attention to their mother, who repeatedly called them, but at length the eldest boy drew near, and she said, "Harry, come and kiss me," to which maternal request he promptly replied, "I won't," and then, pointing to Mr. Townsend, who wore rather a large gold pin, he said, "He's got a brooch in his tie."

"Harry, you naughty boy; you musn't make remarks like that. Come to mother!"

“I won’t. I want to see that brooch,” and running up to Townsend, he was about to take the pin, when his mother caught him up, and carried him to her own seat. He kicked, struggled, and screamed, and freeing himself from her grasp, was about to clutch the pin when the baleful light in Mr. Townsend’s eyes arrested him, and he returned sulkily to his mother, from whom he broke away again in a moment, however, to examine Miss Forrester’s bracelet. The other children now came forward, and various attempts were made by Mrs. Whitegate to induce them to sing or recite something, but the little lions—like larger ones—could not be made to roar in the presence of strangers, and the entrance of the gentlemen put an end to what, in the opinion of *one* lady present, at all events, was a painful exhibition.

Seeing the children on show, and expensively apparelled, Mr. Whitegate called them to him in carressing tones, but they were evidently unaccustomed to these, and hung back regarding him stolidly, and without interest. He was not pleased with this, and at an early opportunity hinted to his wife that she had better take the children to bed, which feat she accomplished with difficulty, amidst a tempest of childish anger and screams of “I won’t go!”

Miss Forrester, who was musical, was now asked to sing, and did so, and then, with her sister Mary, played a lively duet with a gravity that would have

been in keeping with "The Dead March in Saul." After a little more music and a few games of cards, the guests departed at an early hour to their host's and own relief, and even Miss Mary realised that the evening had been a dull one, for she said to her sister Edith as they were walking home, "I didn't enjoy myself a bit,. Did you?"

"Enjoy myself? No," and the speaker almost shuddered as she thought of the glaring, upholstered, unhome-like house, its ill-assorted occupants, and uncomfortable *menage*.

## CHAPTER XII.

THEIR friends the enemy took such decided action now, that Staunton and Ryan found themselves in a fair way to be extinguished altogether, for they were quite unable to obtain any fresh business, and their few advertising contracts were not nearly sufficient to enable them to hold on for any length of time. Wilkes, who had been rapidly falling into a condition of despair, owing to his inability to secure orders, relapsed into his old evil habit, and remained in a condition of inebriety for a week, with a few intervals of semi-sobriety, in the course of one of which he said to Ryan, "It's no use, Misser Ryan (hic) ; no use. Perkins is against us, Munks is against us, and they have spoiled us all over the town ; you can't stop 'em eser (hic), no one dare give evnence—I mean evidence—against 'em ; they *daren't*, that's the word, and we'll be dished," and with a despairing hiccup Wilkes went forth, and again drowned the small flicker of sense before it

became strong enough to be troublesome. Ryan saw that he must act at once, and having now completed his evidence, and the opportunity for which he was waiting having arisen, he struck his first return blow.

Perkins, who possessed a large mercantile business which had always suffered from lack of capital, took advantage of the time when affairs were fairly prosperous in Stanley, to form a Limited Liability Company to take over his business, and in this Sellbridge & Co., for good reasons of their own, were anxious that he should succeed. A glowing prospectus was prepared, large advertisements were inserted in the *Sun* and *Star*, setting forth the many advantages of possessing shares in this "old established and prosperous business," and stating that "large and increasing dividends were assured." Scrip for 100,000 shares was prepared, brokers were appointed to receive applications from the investing public, and all was going merry as a marriage bell, when one evening *The Moon* came out with a scorching article under which the prospects of "Perkins & Co., Ltd.," withered up like grass in January. This remorseless leader traced the career of Perkins from the first; pointed out that he had compounded with his creditors twice, showed that he was "holding up" three or four of the most unsound retail businesses in the town, boldly stated that his overdraft at "a certain well-known bank," ran into many thousands of pounds, that in addition he owed large sums to

another "well-known money lending firm," and was, in fact, "oppressed with a huge financial burden, of which he was kind enough to ask the public to relieve him."

Foreseeing a large sale of the paper, Ryan ordered Brady to print several thousand extra copies, but these were soon all sold, and the printing machines had to be kept running to a late hour of night in order to supply the demand.

Early next day Ryan was told that Mr. Perkins and Mr. Munks desired to see him *at once*.

"Show them in," he said, and they entered like a tornado.

Mr. Perkins, a short, stout, plethoric man, opened the fray. "You are the editor of this—this scurrilous sheet," he spluttered.

"I am the editor, and part proprietor of the widely-circulated paper known as *The Moon*," replied Ryan calmly.

"Widely circulated! It will circulate very little longer, I can tell you. Now, I demand the name of the person who wrote this rascally article reflecting on my business and myself."

"I don't heed your 'demand,'" said Ryan. "But not in the least wishing to conceal the matter, I will tell you. I wrote it myself."

"I knew that, Perkins," put in Munks. "I told you it was one of our sacked employees; either this one or that young rascal Staunton."

“ ‘That young rascal, Staunton,’ as you term him, Mr. Munks, is in the next office, and if I call him in, and repeat your words, you will find yourself in the street in two minutes, without your clothing or skin quite intact, either.”

“Perkins, you are witness to this threatening language,” said Munks, changing color as he heard of Staunton’s proximity.

“Perkins, you will be witness to something else besides threatening language if you do not make that fellow keep quiet. He has nothing to do with this matter. And now go on with your yarn.”

“I demand,” said Mr. Perkins, “a full written apology in to-night’s issue of your paper, continuous insertion of this apology in the advertisement columns for fourteen days, insertion of the same apology in twenty-four other papers, to be selected by me, and finally, payment of £1,000 compensation for loss sustained owing to your libellous statements.”

“Anything more?”

“No.”

“And what if I refuse?”

“Do you refuse?”

“Yes.”

“Well then, I am all ready for you. Oh! I can assure you, my gay penny-a-liner, you cannot libel responsible men with impunity. My lawyer and I did not work till four o’clock this morning for nothing.

Johnson!" At this call a stranger, who had evidently been waiting outside the office, entered. "Serve those writs," said Perkins, and continued as the stranger took a couple of documents from his bag, "This is a writ for you, Mr. Robert Fitzgibbon Ryan, for libel; damages laid at £5,000. And now you will perhaps be good enough to call your fighting partner, who 'is in the next office,' in order that he also may receive his little document." Having uttered this pleasantry, Mr. Perkins turned to his friend, and said, "'There will be no *Moon* in the sky soon, Munks. Haw! Haw!" And both worthies laughed loudly, Ryan the while regarding them quietly. He did not seem particularly discomposed, and after glancing at his summons carelessly, he called out "Staunton, will you kindly step this way?"

Staunton entered immediately, and was served with his writ, and then Munks, who appeared ill at ease in the presence of his former antagonist, rose to go, but Ryan said, in tones of the utmost softness, "Pray do not deprive us of the pleasure of your company so soon, Mr. Munks. We shall be sorry to lose the opportunity of returning the delicate attentions shown us by Mr. Perkins and yourself. Come in, Mr. Massey!" An elderly man entered from Staunton's office, and to him Ryan said, "This gentleman is Mr. George Lumley Perkins, and this Mr. William Munks, both well known in Stanley—and *also known elsewhere*" (with



strong emphasis). "Now, gentlemen, here are writs for each of you for libels on Messrs. Staunton and Ryan, which you were so incautious as to repeatedly utter in the presence of ten—sometimes fifty—witnesses. Damages claimed in each case, £5,000; but if Mr. Staunton takes my advice he will go for *you*, Munks, for criminal libel, for you several times, in the presence of witnesses, accused him of having altered the books of Sellbridge & Co., for dishonest purposes of his own. If he does this, you may be removed to an atmosphere to which you are not *entirely unaccustomed*. You swine!" went on Ryan, his dark eyes blazing, and white teeth gleaming, in contrast to his sallow features, "did you really think you could eat us up? Why, I have made it my business to work up all about you two, and I know enough to make the publication of your biographies very interesting to the public of Stanley. We'll fight you every inch you go, and, look here, tell OUR FRIEND MR. RICHARD T. WHITEGATE" (this was said in tones of grating ferocity, which made even Staunton's blood run cold), "that he will have to employ sharper tools than you when he wants to attack us. Clear out now!"

To say that Ryan's swift counter move, suddenly developed ferocity, and evident knowledge of their plans and personal secrets, discomfited the invaders, would be to speak mildly. They were, in pugilistic parlance, "knocked out in one round," and retreated

at once, Perkins muttering as he reached the door, "You will see us again in Court," 'a threat which caused Ryan to leap from his chair with a hideous yell that converted the retreat into a stampede on the part of Perkins and Munks, while the lawyer's clerk, in hopeless bewilderment of the whole affair, followed more slowly.

The moment they were off the premises, Ryan, whom Staunton had been regarding with a look of fear and admiration blended, relaxed his ferocious scowl, and throwing himself back in his chair, laughed heartily.

"You have bluffed 'em," said Massey, who was Braefenfell's clerk.

"Rather! I knew I could beat them easily."

"But this libel," said Staunton, looking doubtfully at the writ, which he still held in his hand.

"My dear fellow, you will hear no more of it. Messrs. Perkins and Munks would not appear in open Court now for twice five thousand pounds. Is not that so, Massey?"

"Quite correct," replied the clerk. "Mr. Braefenfell was certain they would never come to the scratch, especially when they knew he was the lawyer against them; and Mr. Ryan has found out a great deal about them."

"Yes," said the latter, "and even now Perkins will have some trouble to keep safe, even if we do nothing; and they let this company, which they were mad to

think of, die out. You will hear no more, Staunton, and as they will not go on, of course, we need not bother about our great case."

"But what was that you said about Whitegate?" asked Staunton, not yet quite free from doubt.

"I told them to advise him to use sharper tools when attacking us again."

"Then you implied that he was connected with this attack?"

"So he was, and he is our secret enemy." Staunton started. "You look surprised, but such is undoubtedly the case. I was long suspicious; now I am certain."

"I always considered Whitegate a very nice man," objected Staunton. "He was polite and kind enough to me."

"No doubt; he was never otherwise than polite to anyone. He treated you with even exceptional smoothness, because you came with an introduction from Harry Sellbridge; but when he found your acquaintance with the proprietor was slight, and had kept you on for a sufficient time to prevent any suspicion of his having run counter to Sellbridge's wishes being entertained, he allowed Munks to vent his dislike on you, and in your active quarrel with the sub-manager found an excellent excuse for dismissing you."

Staunton was astonished by this revelation, and could not credit Ryan's statements, but the latter referred to Massey, who said, "Without having absolute proof, I

should say that what your partner states is correct. Mr. Braefenfell has, before now, directed my attention to similar cases which have occurred at Sellbridge's."

"But why should Whitegate dismiss you, Ryan? He engaged you himself, I believe?"

"Yes, from amongst fifty applicants for the post. He thought I was smart, and a man likely to suit him, but after a while he found out that I was not the soft metal in his hands that he expected, and wished to dispose of my services; but I never gave him an excuse, and fought him off for two years. But he accomplished his end at last."

"And now, will you please tell me why he is opposed to us, and wishes us away?"

"Ah! That is an interesting question which time alone will answer; but in my opinion, Mr. Staunton, you will live to be much more astonished than was the case to-day. And now I vote that we go and have some lunch at Ducie's. A good meal and a bottle of fizz will do much to banish from our minds all recollections of those unpleasant people, Messrs. Perkins and Munks, who will write us proposing peace, eh Massey?"

"Yes, they will write," replied the lawyer's clerk. And they went out to lunch.

Sure enough, two days later, a letter came from Perkin's solicitor proposing that both libel actions be withdrawn.

On receipt of this letter, Ryan, ignoring the lawyer, called on Mr. Perkins, with whom he had an hour's conversation, at the end of which he returned to his office, thinking, as he went, "Well, *one* of the enemy is removed from our path for ever, and that without much hurt to himself, beyond a deuce of a fright, which he deserved, for he is a consummate rascal. I don't think, however, that Mr. Munks is 'killed,' though he may be scotched, and there is a much more astute and dangerous man behind him, whom it will need all our skill to defeat."

For some considerable time after this everything went well with *The Moon*, the Perkins affair having given it increased prestige, and even the proprietors of the *Sun* and *Star* came to realize that it was a rival to be reckoned with. There was no sign of further action on the part of the opposition for some months, and Staunton began to think that the first victory had been decisive, and that an easy and prosperous career lay before him, but Ryan had no such hopes, and like a wary general who knows his foes, kept ever on the alert.

Free from immediate anxiety, however, the partners were able to carry on their everyday work with vigor and ability, which soon began to yield good results, while Mr. Wilkes, having again become sober, entered on his work with increased activity, and secured advertisements in every quarter of the town. Then, like

another Alexander, sighing for fresh fields to conquer, he extended his efforts to Melbourne, and, after a fortnight in that city, came back with a new suit of clothes, the pockets of which were crammed with the "orders" so dear to the heart of newspaper men. The paper improved in appearance, the monetary returns became larger, and fortune seemed disposed to smile on Messrs. Staunton and Ryan. But she is a treacherous jade, as we all know.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE days sped on, Autumn faded into Winter—the Victorian Winter with a noon-day shade temperature of about 60 degrees, or thereabouts—and amongst other events a few people of the fast thinning “old colonial school” vacated the stage of life, on which they had played hard and somewhat thankless parts. With no loftier aim as a rule than that of securing material advantages for themselves, they had left the lands of civilisation, which had been smoothened and prepared for posterity by thousands of years of unremitting labor, for the great, rough mesozoic continent of the South, where such hard conditions awaited them as even paleolithic man can have scarcely experienced in Europe. Such, at least, is a reasonable contention, for though in the last dozen years our interesting and hairy ancestor has been pushed back from the quaternary into the tertiary period, no one has yet had the hardihood to thrust him a stage further into

the mesozoic period, though, judging from the encouraging results already achieved, it may be possible to push him many stages back, and prove him to have been alive and kicking in that "nebulous haze" from which the solar system is said by some to have consolidated, and *in* which the origin of things is undoubtedly lost.

The Australian colonist did not trouble himself about the age of his adopted land, but entered on possession with cheerfulness, only to find that he had perforce to complete what Nature would have done if allowed "a little more time," say three or four millions of years. Forests had to be thinned out, desert tracts rendered passable, water conserved, and artificial rivers created; the animals, which naturally flourished in other countries, imported; grasses, seeds, and food plants brought in and cultivated; and, in fact, the geological work of an epoch done in a few years.

It was, in the vernacular, "a large order," and only that, providentially, "fools rush in where angels fear to tread," it would never have been attempted. Those who undertook it suffered sorely in the struggle, as is apparent to anyone who has noted the wrinkled, care-worn faces, and spare, lathy frames, on which there is not an ounce of adipose matter, of the old colonists. They had their reward, however, for they all ultimately secured six feet of Australian soil, if they got no more, and further earned the commendation of their



posterity expressed thus, “ ‘ The old man ’ *did* graft hard. Poor old devil, he was only half educated, and knew no better. ”

Besides the passing away of some of Stanley's older residents, certain minor events occurred in circles with which we are acquainted. Commencing with the smallest of these, Staunton, contrary to Ryan's expectations, completed his work of digging and sowing the lucerne patch, while the kyio, as if anticipating the good time coming, watched him over the fence, and occasionally bellowed her approval of the proceedings.

Miss Williams—her natural vanity artfully stimulated by the cunning Ryan—with a view to ending the Guildford Street *raj* for ever, read up cookery, and had already successfully produced kangaroo tail soup, curried wallaby, bronzewing pigeon pie, roast wild duck and teal, and other dinner dishes ; and for breakfast substituted gar fish, smoked blue-cod, kidneys, ham, and other delicacies for the at one time ever present chop. In consequence of this improved diet, Ryan became less dyspeptic, and Staunton showed an alarming disposition to put on flesh, which frantic labor on the lucerne patch was scarcely able to subdue. Whenever Miss Williams showed signs of flagging, or in journalistic phrase, “ repeating herself ” too often, Ryan read her extracts from the works of George Augustas Sala or other writers, reflecting on the want

of originality in Australian cookery, thereby so stimulating her to fresh effort, that she produced a succession of new dishes, each better than its predecessor, and all so good, that Ryan remarked one day to his partner, "One of us will have to marry Miss Williams, and the other board with him for ever, for we could not stand anyone else's cookery after her's."

To the Hermans their usual annual event occurred. Another child was born, and a fresh yell was added to the increasing volume of sound which issued from "The Howleries," and so vexed the soul of Braefenfell that he meditated the addition of ten feet to the dividing wall.

Miss Forrester, about whom it was confidently predicted that she would jilt Mr. Townsend, as she had many an other, disappointed public expectations, and the wedding day was definitely fixed, invitations issued, and the trousseau purchased, when a mishap occurred which temporarily postponed the event. Mr. Forrester, whose alleged taste for gardening has been described, was one day trimming the branches of a fruit tree, when the ladder on which he was standing, fell, and he received serious injuries, including a broken arm, which placed his life in jeopardy for a day or two. This unfortunate accident greatly annoyed the members of his family, who had made all preparations for the wedding, and Jack Forrester, in relating the event to Staunton, said, in tones of withering sarcasm, "Oh, he is a smart one, 'the old man'; he

climbs up a fifteen foot ladder, which is resting against the air, for the branch he called 'a support' would not hold up a laughing jackass, let alone a human one. Of course he fell, and now twenty pounds won't repair his damages, to say nothing about the half-ton of fruit, trifle, wedding cake and stuff that'll be spoiled."

Miss Forrester was quite as sympathetic as her brother, and when Staunton said to her on the occasion of an afternoon call, "I was sorry to hear of your father's severe accident," she replied "Yes, it was very annoying—just when we had got everything ready. Mother is very much put out about it."

"Is he suffering much?"

"He is very irritable and cross, and snaps at everyone who goes near him."

Miss Mary Forrester expressed the opinion that "Pa was always doing silly things," but declared her ignorance of the nature of his injuries, which "were being looked after by the doctor."

Staunton did not see Edith Forrester on that occasion, for "she was reading to Pa" her sister explained, and added, "Edith is always reading, and seems to enjoy it."

Staunton, as he walked home, found himself wondering if he would one day become "the old man" to his children, and be looked upon as a bore should he have a serious illness. "If that is what marriage

brings a man I'll never marry," he said aloud, and was exceedingly discomfited by hearing a musical voice say, "Do you really mean that, Mr. Staunton?" and turning found Miss Copplestone at his elbow. She was most becomingly dressed, and wore a hat rakishly turned up at one side, which imparted a charming piquancy to her fair young face. Staunton looked rather foolish as she continued, "I did not know that you were given to soliloquising, especially on the subject of matrimony."

"I do not, as a rule, speak my thoughts aloud, Miss Copplestone, and I do not know what made me do so now," stammered Staunton. There was a gleam of amusement in her eyes as she said, "I must apologise for over-hearing, but I saw you passing, and ran out to say that papa wants to see you particularly."

Staunton entered the house with her, and was at once taken to Mr. Copplestone's den by that gentleman, who said, "You don't love that man Munks, I know, Staunton, and moreover, would do a kindly action for its own sake. Now, that poor wretch, Herman, is being persecuted to the verge of despair by Munks. I see and hear something of what is going on in Sellbridge's, and I wonder that Whitegate allows it. But I cannot very well interfere, as in my position of trustee to Harry Sellbridge, I have to confine myself to the concerns of the estate only, and it would not do for me to quarrel with Munks or anyone in the busi-

ness. I, however, thought that if Ryan or you were to lend Herman moral support, and keep an eye on him, you might prevent him from losing heart, and enable him to bear up against Munks' tyranny."

"Does he need moral support?"

"Very much so. The fact is," said Mr. Copplestone, lowering his voice, "the persecution he has had to endure has driven him to drink, I am told. He has been seen in an intoxicated condition several times lately, though not during business hours."

"That is bad," remarked Staunton.

"Very; and it will mean his ruin, and that of his wife and family, if it continues. You know the man's position, and the terrible millstone he has tied round his neck."

"Seven or eight millstones. He is as truly a slave as any American negro 'befo' de wah.'"

"Quite so; and no one in this town more sorely needs help than this same slave."

"I will do my very best to aid him," said Staunton, heartily, whereupon the old gentleman, who had been weeding in the garden, grasped his hand with such fervor as to coat it thickly with mould. Observing this, he apologised profusely, hurried off in search of soap and water, and then insisted on his visitor remaining to partake of afternoon tea. Staunton's earlier experiences on that day had not tended towards raising his spirits, or opiuiion of human nature, but the cor-

rective was here, and he soon found himself in a very contented frame of mind, as he watched the affectionate care with which Miss Coplestone waited on her parents, and noted their caressing manner towards her. "Without love and sympathy, life is an empty thing," he reflected, as he mentally contrasted the Forrester household with this, and then, feeling his equanimity quite restored, he asked for a third cup of tea, and gossiped on till darkness set in, utterly oblivious of the flight of time, and the fact that Ryan was then doing double work and apostrophising him—the absent Staunton—in language which was not exactly that of "love and sympathy."

## CHAPTER XIV.

IN fulfilment of his promise to Mr. Copplestone, Staunton called next evening at "The Howleries," where he found Mrs. Herman comparatively unoccupied, for she had no more in hand than the work of rocking the latest baby's cradle, and soothing the ruffled feelings of the two next in size, both of whom were teething, and expressing their disapproval of Nature's painful methods by loud yells of anguish. To Staunton's query as to the whereabouts of her husband, Mrs. Herman replied that "he had not yet returned from his office;" but Staunton well knew that night work was not a practice at Sellbridge's. "He is often late now," said Mrs. Herman, wearily, a statement which satisfied Staunton that Mr. Copplestone's information was correct. He spent the remainder of the evening seeking the erring accountant in various hotels, but without success, and he therefore determined to enlist the sympathies of the experienced Wilkes in this matter.

The luckless reporter of *The Moon* was a dipsomaniac, and like many who are thus afflicted, hated the cause of his disease, and was always ready to save a fellow creature from the melancholy fate which had overtaken himself. He therefore agreed to help Staunton with the utmost readiness, and a few nights afterwards at 11 p.m. arrived at Mrs. Williams' with the news for Staunton that he had found Herman in a low public house called "The Divan."

"I have found out that he has been drinking on and off for several weeks," said Wilkes, "and to-night he must have been going the pace properly, for he is hopelessly intoxicated now. He will lose his billet for certain this time, for it is impossible for him to get sober between this and office hours in the morning. To make matters worse, too, that fellow Munks is aware of his state, for he is constantly at 'The Divan, strictly on the Q.T., you know, and this evening when I was there I saw him looking at Herman, who was lying senseless on a sofa in the little room behind the bar. He grinned as he watched him, and I guessed it was all up with Herman."

In a moment Staunton had decided what to do. Ryan was not well, and had gone to bed, so he would have to rely on Wilkes for assistance in what he proposed to do, which was to rescue Herman from impending fate, if that were possible. Wilke's aid was immediately forthcoming, and together they set



forth to the portion of the town wherein was situated The Divan, a small hotel of evil reputation. It was nearly midnight when they reached the house, which was enveloped in darkness. Staunton knocked at the front door, but got no response. He then went round to the back, but observed no sign of life there, so returning to the front commenced a vigorous assault on the door, which was followed by a shuffling sound in the passage, whereupon he said, "You have a Mr. Herman here. I have come to take him away, and if you don't open the door I will send for the police."

This produced the desired effect, for a voice asked, "Who are you?"

"A friend of Mr. Herman's."

"What name?"

"Staunton."

After some shuffling and whispering, the door opened, and a man in his shirt sleeves appeared. "Come in," he said, gruffly, and Staunton and Wilkes entered. "You've come to take the bloke away?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm willin'. It's not in my line keeping fellers lyin' drunk on sofers when the pleece might come any minute, and I might have me bloomin' licence endorsed for the thirld and larst time.'" Muttering and growling, he led the way to a room where Herman lay in utter insensibility. Staunton had, unhappily, too frequently seen men in a condition

of intoxication, but never one like this. The man was as one dead, his arms fell limp on being lifted, and released again, his head was like a mass of lead. It was useless to place him in an upright position, so Wilkes took his feet, while Staunton grasped him under the arms, and in this fashion they set forth.

With occasional rests they conveyed their burden for nearly a mile, and were approaching the central part of the town, when they were pounced upon by two youthful and zealous policemen, who, believing they had caught a couple of murderers red-handed, would not listen to explanations, and marched them off to the station with a solemnity and consciousness of "juty" well done, that would have been amusing to Staunton were it less irritating under present circumstances. Fortunately, the sergeant in charge knew both Staunton and Herman, and realising that the latter would be ruined if detained, he dismissed them at once. They were stopped once more by a policeman when near Mrs. Williams'; but this man Staunton also knew, and he suffered them to proceed, remarking seriously, "It's a frightful thing, drink—when you take too much of it"—he added, the qualifying phrase being uttered, as a thought of the nobbler he had enjoyed so much before coming on duty crossed his mind. These delays occasioned great loss of valuable time, and Wilkes, as he glanced at the clock on Staunton's mantlepiece, and saw that the hands stood at half-past

one, said, "We will never get this chap on his feet, and ready for work in six or seven hours."

"I mean to try, any way. But, heavens! Look at the man's clothes!"

Herman, under a strong light, presented a sorry spectacle indeed, and as he had been seen thus by Munks, the latter must have felt sure of his prey this time. The thought spurred Staunton to action, and he went to work with a will, and aided by Wilkes, carried the insensible man upstairs, where most of his clothing was removed, and the over-laden stomach relieved of some of the vile poison which this fool had poured into it. A bath was next filled with tepid water, and Herman placed therein Wilkes holding his head up to prevent him from dropping under the surface and being drowned. He was next, with much difficulty, held upright under the shower, and a cold stream turned on his head. This revived him somewhat, and he kicked and struggled with such vigor that Wilkes and Staunton, who were not anxious for a shower-bath with their clothes on, were, nevertheless, treated to something very like one. When he was being dried, Herman remarked feebly, "You have taken all the clothes, dear, as usual," which showed that his sensory nerves, at all events, were regaining their functions, and his suspended faculties returning. He was next clad in a warm night-gown, and placed in an arm-chair, while Staunton went in

search of ammonia and soda water, both of which were in the house. When the ammonia was placed to his nose Herman started violently, opened his eyes and asked, "Where am I?"

"You are all right," said Staunton. "Drink this."

The patient, who was commencing to feel the fever of his excess, seized the glass of soda water and drank eagerly. "I believe we shall get him round in time, Wilkes," remarked Staunton, as they lifted him into bed, and left him to repose for four or five hours.

When they had obtained some refreshment for themselves they repaired to the kitchen, where they set themselves to brush Herman's clothes and boots. On the latter Wilkes put a polish that would "dazzle old Mund's eyesight, and blind him to the real facts of the case," as he said, with a grin of satisfaction. They then snatched a few hours' repose, one on the sofa, the other in a large chair, but before dawn Staunton arose, and calling Miss Williams, gave her a rapid history of the case, and asked for her assistance in completing the good work, which the kind-hearted "nitive"—though she had a particular antipathy to men who drank to excess—willingly accorded (for the sake of his wife and family, she explained.)

She soon had a fire burning, on which she heated an iron, and having mended Herman's damaged garments, pressed them with the iron and a damp cloth till they looked almost as though they were new. She next

prepared some strong tea, and when this was ready Staunton awakened Herman, who came very slowly to his senses, and appeared so confused and helpless at first that his rescuers almost despaired of success. The tea, however, acted like magic on his starved frame—the man had not taken a wholesome meal for days—and he became clear-headed enough to realize his position, and all that had been done for him. He could scarcely believe his eyes at first when he saw his nicely-pressed clothes, carefully-brushed hat, and shining boots placed in readiness by the bedside, and Staunton had some difficulty in repressing the torrent of thanks he poured forth.

He was soon up, and after a cold bath, improved still further. He had not shaved for days, however, and this presented a fresh difficulty, as his hand was as yet much too unsteady to guide a razor in safety, but Wilkes, the many-sided, proved equal, even to this unusual occasion, and performed the operation with the skill not alone of an ordinary barber, but of a tonsorial artist.

When Herman was fully dressed, he looked as if he had “come out of a band-box instead of The Divan,” in the words of Wilkes, and Staunton laughed as he thought of Munks’ surprise. At breakfast Herman managed to swallow some toast, an egg, and some more tea. With solid sustenance to keep him going, there was now little fear of his collapsing, or being obliged

to resort to stimulants for fictitious support. At ten minutes after eight he intercepted his usual tram at a street corner, and when half-an-hour or so later Munks entered the office with more noise and pomposity than usual, he started and gasped, for there where he expected to find a vacant stool, or better still, a shaking, sodden, dishevelled figure, sat Mr. Herman, the accountant, clean, cool, sober, spick and span, with his face as smooth as marble, and his hair parted with scientific accuracy, and brushed back artistically from his expansive brow. Munks glared on this vision with dismay, and something like fear, for had he not seen the man stretched senseless and disordered under the influence of the vile poison retailed at The Divan, some nine or ten hours before? Astonishment for the moment banished reason, and he was on the point of saying to Herman, "I saw you at The Divan last night," but recollected in time that this would make known the fact that he himself was at The Divan—the very lowest place in town—which would never do. He was obliged, therefore, to smother his curiosity for the present, but he sat glowering at Herman as if the latter had seven heads. At the lunch hour his eagerness to learn how the miracle had been accomplished was too great to brook further delay, and at the risk of being seen by many to whom his private habits were unknown, he hurried by back streets to The Divan, and from the landlord learned that Herman had been

rescued by Staunton. Filled with bitterness at being again thwarted by a man whom he had at one time despised as "a paper collar chap," his hatred of Staunton was revived in full force, and fed by envy, revenge and all the foul passions of an evil mind, became a veritable mania that might have led him into the commission of some desperate deed, but for a more powerful controlling power—fear.

Munks' absence from the office gave Herman an opportunity to go home and relieve his wife's fears, and be welcomed back into the capacious bosom of his family. Having found "The Howleries" in tears, and left it in laughter, and moreover, having enjoyed a fairly substantial luncheon, he returned to the office almost quite restored to health and spirits.

That evening Mr. Copplestone and Mr. Staunton called to see him, and explained everything that had happened, at the same time warning him that Munks would accomplish his ruin if he gave him another chance. They then made him promise that he would drink no more, and departed, feeling the happier for having helped a fellow creature at a crisis. Both deserved credit, but Staunton in a high degree, for, rigidly abstemious himself, the circumstances of Herman's lapse and rescue had been intensely distasteful to him.

Wilkes was the recipient of a handsome present from Mr. Copplestone, coupled with a request that he,

too, would solemnly promise to abstain from intoxicating liquor in future. He accepted the present with gratitude, and instantly gave the promise in return, fully intending to keep it, and temporarily forgetful of the fact that in the course of his life he had made, and broken, some eighty-six similar promises.



## CHAPTER XV.

MR. COPPLESTONE, who was the "Old Wardle" of Stanley, made the rescue of Herman an excuse for inviting Staunton, and Ryan also, to a picnic on a holiday, when there would be no publication of the paper, "just as a feeble return to Mr. Staunton for his generous action." Staunton demurred feebly, and Ryan more vigorously, but when Mr. Copplestone mentioned incidentally that his daughter, the Miss Forresters, and other young ladies, who were going, would be much disappointed by a refusal, the partners gave in, and accepted the invitation.

"An Australian picnic." What memories these words bring to the luckless wight who dwells amidst the fogs and gloom of London, where day and night are almost as one, where for many months of the year the sun is not readily distinguishable from a gas lamp, and the only pleasure lies in drawing down the blinds, building up the fire, and forgetting that there is any

"outside" at all. This is but a temporary pleasure, however ; work must be done and exercise taken, so muffled to the eyes and coated like a sentry, the sufferer goes forth, and amidst gloom and grime makes his way, on greasy pavements, to "the City," where the fog is denser, and the grime thicker than ever. The English are taunted with being a melancholy race. They are the merriest people on earth—when the circumstance of their climate is considered. They are the true "Children of the Mist," with due respect to Mr. Rider Haggard, for fog or "haze" are always with them, and an Australian viewing for the first time an English landscape, on what is facetiously termed "a clear day" by the hapless natives, would be certain to remark, "There must be a big bush fire somewhere, judging by the smoke." But the English are quite cheerful about it. They all (except a few harmless lunatics, who are allowed to wander at large) admit that their climate is "beastly," and when they have coughed a cubic foot or so of fog off their chests, will even laugh at its eccentricities and their own folly for remaining in it, when there are so many other pleasant parts of the world to go to. But leave we the fogs, and on the wings of thought, speed to a sunnier land, where "the weather" is quite a minor question, and picnicing is a natural and enjoyable entertainment, instead of a dismal mockery, as it too often is in England. In Australia we go straight to the bush

from the nearest station or road, and have not to humbly crave leave from any important proprietor, or his still more important steward before selecting our camping ground, or keep rigidly to roads or beaten paths in our march. No ; we go right on, never thinking of "keeping off the grass," and presently entering the bush, make our way over huge logs and through thick scrub, the ladies, gallantly assisted by their cavaliers, who also bear the eatables and indispensable billies. The dry twigs snap, and crisp grasses rustle under our footsteps, and the odor of the eucalyptus is about us. Presently, our guide, who has already lost his way twice, announces that he has lost it again, and a council of war is called, the distinguishing features of which are the anxiety of each gentleman to exhibit himself in the character of an experienced bushman, and the facility with which each lady shows herself to be absolutely devoid of the bump of locality. Presently, the only man who has not joined the council finds the way, and pressing on eagerly in his tracks, we ascend a considerable hill, and on the summit of this find ourselves in an open space, covered with short grass, and commanding a view of many a mile of bush-covered country. A few paces down the hill a little stream bubbles out, and gurgles on its way to the larger creek in the valley. The billies are soon filled, dry logs gathered, and a fire set going. In a very brief space of time baskets

are unpacked, and the sward is strewn with cold meats, preserves, cakes, fruit, bottles, glasses, cups, plates, and all the numerous etceteras of a picnic. No need is there for coats or shawls to sit on, and we throw ourselves on the crisp, dry grass, and with appetites sharpened by a long walk through the bush, discuss the multifarious viands that have been prepared for our delectation. The laughter and fun are at their height, when suddenly young Smith, who has been burning to distinguish himself all day, declares that he sees a snake on the edge of the clearing, and a rush is made to kill the reptile, which turns out to be part of a small sappling. Smith then has the pleasure of being told by six or seven of his intelligent fellow-countrymen (who would hardly unanimously make the statement unless they were fairly certain of their ground) that he is a fool, while the ladies, unable (on account of the monstrously unjust social rules which press so heavily on the sex) to thus openly express their opinions, declare that "Mr. Smith ought not to cause unnecessary alarm." The false alarmist sits abashed for a few minutes, but is relieved by the action of Jones, who upsets the billy into the fire, whereupon the party rises as one man and woman, and denounces him, for everyone is "dying for a cup of tea." Jones apologises humbly; is forgiven reluctantly, and sent to the stream for more water. The billy soon boils again, tea is made, and Jackson is about to fill Brown's cup

when the beautiful Miss Summerton gives a shrill scream, which causes Jackson to start and spill some of the scalding fluid on Brown's hand. The injured one drops his cup, and strains his whole organisation in the effort to suppress a troublesome, but almost necessary word, which always recurs to the mind on such occasions as this.

Brown's agonies pass unnoticed, however, for everyone is attending to Miss Summerton, and anxiously inquiring into the cause of her outcry. She has been "bitten on the finger by a scorpion or centipede." Horror!—for the bites of these creatures are dangerous. Investigation, however, proves the ungallant assailant to have been a combative bull-ant, who now rears himself on his hind legs and bids defiance to his foes, though he is only one inch long and they sixty-five or seventy. His pluck excited compassion, and he is allowed to go unmolested, though Miss Summerton eyes him vindictively as she sits with the injured finger in her mouth. Tea is sipped at leisure as we recline on the ground, and then tobacco completes the soothing of male nerves, while the ladies brush the crumbs from their dresses, and seek out trowels and gardening knives, which are to be used in digging up such portions of the forest as are portable. The bush is now entered, and some commence to search for ferns, some for wild flowers and grasses, some for beetles, spiders, and such interesting creatures, while others—

the younger folk—wander away to long distances, and yet find nothing of scientific interest, for they return empty-handed. The usually silent bush echoes with the sounds of laughter and conversation ; the gleam of bright costumes is seen here and there amidst the dark green undergrowth ; an occasional crash or stifled scream, followed by a burst of laughter, announces a fall ; an exclamation, a shot, and a loud “thud,” “thud” evidence the escape of a wallaby, which, with marvellous bounds of his long hind-legs, soon distances pursuit.

Brown, who is near-sighted, steps into a crab-hole and is brought to the ground with such violence that his spectacles are broken, whereat a jackass, sitting on a bough close by, laughs hideously. Jones covers himself with distinction by killing a small snake, a feat that excites the envy of poor Smith, who has not had the chance to distinguish himself, which he so earnestly wishes for. Determined to do *something*, he uproots a fern tree, weighing about a hundredweight, and against all advice declares his intention of carrying it home. We struggle back to the camping ground, each bearing a wealth of greenery that would be worth many pounds in London ; and claret and water having been dispensed to the ladies, and something a little stronger to the gentlemen, a start is about to be made for home when it is discovered that Miss Summerton and Jackson have not yet arrived.

The sun is declining, and it high time to depart, so a search party is organised, and its members go "Coo-eeing" in all directions. A faint answering "Coo-ee" is at length heard, and the lost ones are seen walking arm-in-arm by the bank of the creek.

"Come on, you two!" shouts Smith, savagely. (He is a little jealous.) And the arms are instantly released, while the lady draws away from the gentleman.

"You have been botanising, I suppose?" remarked Smith sarcastically, as they came up.

"Oh! yes. We found a lovely fern gully higher up the creek."

"And where are the ferns?"

"In the gully, of course."

"But why did you not fetch some away?"

"Well, they were—hem—they were *large* ferns; fern trees, you know, and all that. I couldn't carry a fern tree, and—"

"Hold a girl at the same time," mutters Smith, in a tone only audible to himself, as he drops moodily behind.

Burdens are now assumed for the homeward march, and the ladies are surprised and disappointed to find that they have collected four times as many plants as they will be able to carry, even though they load themselves with many more than will ever see the other end, as the gentlemen well know. In close formation we set out, but in less than half-an-hour the order has

changed to straggling file. Jones, the snake-killer and indomitable, is the leader, and the far-distant rear is brought up by Miss Summerton and Jackson, with the perspiring Smith and his fern tree, in close and unwished-for attendance.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Jinks thinks she really does not care for that native grass, and throws away a huge lump that she has borne thus far with infinite labor, while Mrs. Smalley reluctantly relinquishes a wild cherry tree which had been removed from its native soil with great labor by Mr. Smalley, who now watches its abandonment with very mixed feelings, and would, doubtless, essay to carry it himself, only that he is already laden like a London costermonger's donkey. Just when all the specimens are in imminent risk of being left behind, a loud "Hurrah!" from the heroic Jones announces that he has emerged into the open, and the failing energies of the party revive as if by magic. Even Smith wipes his heated brow with fresh determination, and picking up his fern tree (which now weighs a ton), staggers along in the wake of Miss Summerton, who hangs heavily on Jackson's arm, which is aching even under that adorable burden, though he would not say so for the world. The open paddocks are here, and the rest is easy. The station is reached without further botanical sacrifice, and all difficulties are over—that is, nearly over—for, on arrival of the train, Smith's fern tree occasions some little



trouble to the guard, who, as he drags it into the van, remarks sarcastically, "Timber should be sent by truck." It is stowed away at last, however; the doors bang, and away we go, the cushions of the carriages seeming luxurious indeed after the labors of the day. At station after station the members of the party drop off. At one Miss Summerton leaves us, and Jackson, in his anxiety to be near her as long as possible, alights with her, and is so long over his adieux that the train starts. Miss Summerton gives a little cry, he springs for the retreating carriage, is thrust by a porter, pulled by Smith, and falls in a heap on the floor, mangled but triumphant, despite the sour regard of Smith, who wonders if it would have been justifiable homicide to let him fall under the wheels. A small residue arrives at the last station, tired out but happy; and then home to rest, with aching muscles, perhaps, but greatly invigorated nerves and brains. And so ends our Australian picnic.

## CHAPTER XVI.

THE Copplestone's picnic took place on the summit of Mount Lofty, an outpost of the chain of mountains which formed an attractive background to Stanley, and the cultivated lands surrounding it. The weather was gloriously fine, but a cool southerly breeze kept the temperature between 65deg. and 70deg. all day, so that active exertion could be undertaken without discomfort. As Staunton wandered through the bush with Miss Copplestone—that lady and he played the parts of Miss Summerton and Mr. Jackson in the foregoing chapter—he found himself thinking of Tennyson's lines—

In the Spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove ;  
In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts  
of love.

And here it may be remarked that if these lines be true in cold England, they are doubly so in genial Australia, the land to which Aphrodite seems to have transferred her rule from the Isles of the Aegean Sea—

a rule, however, which it is only right to say has been purified during the long centuries which have passed since the Goddess was powerful in Athens or Sparta, or since the later days when her name was changed, and worship still further debased by Rome. To leave classical metaphor, the instinct of love has "evoluted" upward, as even a pessimist must allow, and may yet prove the saving instinct of the race. Be this as it may, there can be no doubt that latitude has a great deal to do with the intensity of the passion, and that nations North of the forty-fifth parallel (amongst which, the English are, of course, included) are not properly equipped for discussing love questions. They should move to thirty-five North or South, and then they would be in a position to argue. No word of love had passed between Staunton and his companion; indeed, their acquaintance was too recent for that, but, nevertheless, each felt pleasure in being with the other, and determined apparently to enjoy this to the full, they repeatedly lost themselves in the course of the day.

Ryan, the morose, who in the forenoon had been much depressed, and wished the picnic "at the deuce," completely recovered his spirits after a time, and with Miss Edith Forrester, spent a most enjoyable time digging up ferns, and seeking for wild flowers.

"I shall take up my permanent abode in the country," remarked Staunton, as they were partaking of wine and water prior to returning.

"Then you will have to live single all your life," said Ryan, "or go to England for a wife. No Australian woman can endure the country."

"What a libel on us," said Miss Edith. "I love the country."

"Then you are the exception that proves the rule?"

"Not the only exception, for I like it too," said Miss Copplestone.

"Do you, really?" exclaimed Staunton. "I am delighted to hear it."

"Why?" demanded the cruel Ryan, with a grin.

"Because—because—community of taste, and all that, you know," stammered Staunton, with such embarrassment that the editor and Miss Edith laughed heartily, while Miss Copplestone blushed.

Miss Forrester, Miss Mary, and Mr. Townsend now seated themselves near the others, and Ryan, knowing that he would find support for his argument, said to the first-named, "We have just been talking about country life, Miss Forrester. Do you like it?"

"No," replied the lady, with more energy than she usually displayed, and then added, "The country is horrid."

"Horrid, is it?" Do you think so, too, Miss Mary?"

"Yes," replied that young lady, stolidly, apparently very little interested.

"You hear, Staunton!"

"Yes ; but they would change their opinions after six months or so in the country. You like it, don't you, Townsend ?"

"Aw ! Ai like the countray in England, where there's lots of shooting and hunting, you know, but not in Austwalia, where there's nothing on earth to do from mawning till night, unless you like to risk your bones over those beastly post-and-wail fences, or go shooting wabbits and ducks—awf'ly poor sport." And Mr. Townsend arranged his chin in his collar with the air of a man who had said all there was to say on the subject.

Staunton was not to be diverted from his idea, however, by any amount of opposition, and all the way home he kept pointing out bush-covered hills and knolls, whereon "a lovely little house could be built," and where "the exposure was just right for vines." One rounded hill in particular struck his fancy, and he drew such a moving picture of the delights of clearing, fencing, making lawns, orchards, and flower gardens, and, in fact, producing a condition of high civilisation in the bush that Miss Copplesstone's cheek became flushed with pleasure as she listened, while Miss Edith followed his words with a look of quiet approval in her clear eyes, and even the unimpressible Ryan was interested. Miss Mary Forrester, who was in the carriage, however, surveyed the speaker with the animated gaze of a statue, and her brother Jack, who

drove, expressed the opinion that "the country was all rot." "It is suitable enough for Irishmen and Germans," he went on, "but not for any reasonable being. It's all theory with you, Staunton, and you would very soon find the practical part very different to what you imagine. It isn't all fruit-picking and flower growing in the country, I can tell you, though you appear to think so. You are just like the old man. He is always raving about the country, but takes very good care not to go there himself, though he wants others to go. Why, only last night he said to me, 'Jack, I wish you'd go on to a station.' Me go on a station—a bright idea! I had to knock that on the head at once, so I turned and said to him—— 'Hold up, you bally old crock!'" It may be necessary to remark that these last words had not been addressed to Forrester *pere*, but to the horse, which stumbled and interrupted the torrent of Mr. Jack's eloquence.

Staunton immediately returned to the charge, and vowed that theory or no theory, he meant to take to country life and leave commerce, which was "debasing," "enervating," "soul-destroying," and a few things more.

"You are not in commerce, now," said Ryan, "but following the noble profession of journalism."

"That is just about the same; in it you have to *write* lies—in commerce you *speak* them."

"I thought you liked journalism," said Miss Edith,

with a laugh.

"I like it well enough, as town pursuits go, but I am beginning to see that there is much more humbug and falsity about it than I imagined ; and I should very much prefer to be dependent on no man, but to work out my own life in my own way."

Further conversation was cut short by their arrival at the Copplestone Villa, where a further festivity in the form of a dance was to take place later on in the evening.

Concerning this, only a single episode need be described—one that was long remembered in Stanley, and of which Ryan was the hero. It arose out of an argument with Jack Forrester, Townsend, and others, upon the possibility of distinguishing Australian natives from other English-speaking people. "I have an infallible test by means of which I can at once distinguish an Australian, or, at all events, a Victorian," said Ryan.

"What is it ?" asked Jack Forrester.

"That is my secret."

"Well, prove your words."

"Very good. I don't know three people here outside your family and the Copplestone's ; yet, I will wager you a sovereign that I can pick out the Victorians from, say, fifty people, without making more than five mistakes. I have to allow myself a small margin for error, for on second thoughts I cannot guarantee that my test is *absolutely* reliable."

After some further discussion, Jack Forrester accepted the bet, and the plan of procedure having been arranged, he mounted a chair just when a dance had concluded, and addressing the surprised guests, said, "A gentleman present has professed his ability to distinguish Victorians from other English-speaking people—all strangers to him—and the matter had been made the subject of a small wager. We will ask your kind assistance towards settling the point." This statement was received with much amusement, and the guests were greatly interested in what promised to be a novel experiment.

Ryan then came forward and explained his intentions. "I propose to interview each of the persons selected alone," he said, "and I must ask you all to promise that you will not reveal what passes till the experiment has been decided, and for my part I promise to ask one question only."

"But you might ask us where were we born?" objected one of the guests.

"No; my question will, in no sense, be a direct one, as you will learn in a minute or two. And now, have I your promise to keep my secret?"

"Yes," they all cried.

"Thank you. I am particular about this matter of secrecy, for my task will be a difficult one, Mr. Forrester being about to select persons who are total strangers to me. I will now retire, and will only see



those he selects singly." Ryan then withdrew to the supper-room, and Jack Forrester selected fifty guests of both sexes for the experiment. This done, he announced to Ryan that all was ready. The first guest, a lady, entered the supper-room, and in a few minutes emerged, bearing a small slip of paper in her hand, and took up her position at the end of the line. Her reappearance was greeted with laughter, and then the next in rotation, a gentleman, went in. He emerged empty-handed; but the next came out bearing a slip of paper. So the matter went on till the whole fifty had passed in and out, when Ryan emerged and selected those who carried a slip of paper, and requested them to stand in a row at one side of the room. There were thirty-three, leaving seventeen at the other side. He then took up a position in the centre, and the result was waited for with breathless interest. "My deeply-thought-out, and, I may almost say, magical researches," he said, "have resulted in my finding that the thirty-three ladies and gentlemen who hold slips of paper in their hands, are natives of Victoria, while the seventeen on the other side of the room are English, Irish, Scotch, possibly New Zealanders, Canadians, or Americans. I only undertook to find the Victorians." A babel of voices now broke forth, but Jack Forrester requested silence, and going down the line, demanded the birthplace of each person. The result proved that of the thirty-three persons stated by Ryan to be Vic-

torians, thirty-one were actually so, while on the other side he had only made one mistake, having failed to recognise as a Victorian a lady who was a native of Stanley.

He thus made only three errors in all, which was within the stipulated number of five, and he therefore won the bet.

The result surprised everyone, and "How did you find out?" was the question addressed to Ryan by fifty voices. Smiling, he said, "I shall be pleased to explain, but I must ask you to remain in line for a few minutes longer. As you know," he went on, "I asked each person a single question in the supper-room, and in order that you may judge the result, I will ask it again, requesting the Victorian ladies and gentlemen only to answer it, and to do so all together in this instance. Attention, please. The question is, 'What does c-o-w spell?'"

"Kyow!" cried the Victorians, in loud chorus.

"Thank you," said Ryan; and then turning to the other line, said, "Will you please answer, in similar fashion, what does c-o-w spell?"

"Cow!" came the "foreign" chorus.

"There is my great secret," said Ryan. "The Victorians said that c-o-w spelt 'kyiow,' the others that it spelt 'cow,' and thus I distinguished them."

"Well, I'm blest!" said Jack Forrester, while Ryan was loudly applauded by the laughing guests, includ-

ing even the Victorians, who had just learned that, though they might be the smartest and most go-ahead people on earth, they yet could not pronounce the simple word "cow." They tried it again and again, and the familiar domestic animal was "in everyone's mouth," so to speak, but pronounce the word naturally, and without effort, they could not.

The story of the experiment was retailed in Stanley next day, and quickly found its way into the columns of the *Sun* and *Star*, whence it travelled to Melbourne, where a fierce controversy concerning it arose.

This spread all over the colony, drawing in University professors, schoolmasters, clergymen, newspaper editors, and the general public, till all Victoria, from Millewa to Croajingolong County, rang with the fray, and, in the words of Staunton, "All the Spanish bull-fights of the last two centuries did not make so great a noise as the great Victorian 'kyiow' fight."

## CHAPTER XVII.

It has been stated that Ryan, despite the period of calm following the Perkins episode, did not relax his vigilance, or cease to expect further molestation, for he well knew the subtle and dangerous character of the man whom he believed to be the principal opponent of Staunton and himself. The unforeseen generally happens, however, and all his care was rendered nugatory by a combination of circumstances, which almost ended the career of the young firm and that successful paper, *The Moon*. One day Ryan received a telegram signed "Matthew Laughton," which caused him considerable perplexity, as it urgently requested his presence in Melbourne, and he was very reluctant to leave Stanley under present circumstances, even for a day. However, on explaining his dilemma to Staunton, that young gentleman pooh-poohed the idea of risk in the matter, declared his ability to superintend one issue of the paper unaided, and promised to exercise every

watchfulness and care. So, with some misgivings, Ryan departed to Melbourne by the first train next day.

Feeling rather more important than usual, and full of confidence, Staunton arrived at the office, to have his confidence banished in a moment by finding that Brady was not there. The absent foreman was the only really experienced person on the paper, and, without him, everything was at sixes and sevens, and, when too late, Staunton saw the risk of depending entirely on one man, and, in his first perturbation, thought seriously of telegraphing for Ryan, but on further reflection, dismissed the idea as useless, for a printer was required, not an editor. Instead, therefore, he despatched Wilkes to search for Brady, and while he was away, attended to the correspondence, and prepared some articles and paragraphs for the evening's issue. In a couple of hours Wilkes returned, with the disquieting information that Brady had not been home at all on the previous evening, but had been seen intoxicated at midnight.

"He has commenced drinking, and won't be right now for a fortnight. I know old Brady well," said Wilkes, despondently.

Staunton began to feel extremely uneasy, but, reviewing the position as calmly as possible, soon saw that, *nolens volens*, he would have to trust to what knowledge and experience were possessed by Brady's second, a young compositor named Ben Lister.

Ben had a full belief in his own abilities, and, when Staunton asked if he could produce the paper, he replied, in the self-assured tone of his kind, "Well, I ought to. I've been at this printing job for three years, and if I don't know something, I ought."

"I don't want 'oughts.' Can you do it?"

"Well, I should be able."

"I don't want 'shoulds' either. Can you, man?"

"Well, if you think I can't——"

"I don't think anything about it, and am simply asking a plain question, to which I want a plain answer, 'yes' or 'no.' Can you get the paper out?"

"Yes," said Ben, sullenly, seeing that there was no escape, and, with some misgivings, Staunton let him go on with the work.

It progressed badly, however, to an accompaniment of coughs and giggles, which irritated Staunton, who, however, had little time to attend to the printing office, as caller after caller came in and engaged his attention. The boys brought a proof or two to his office late in the day, but, being closely occupied, he was obliged to order that they should be given to Mr. Wilkes to read. It was fully three hours after the time when the paper should have been out, when Staunton got rid of his last caller.

He had worked without ceasing from breakfast time, and, feeling almost faint from hunger, determined to run home to dinner, leaving Wilkes in charge of the

office, and cautioning him not to allow the paper to be printed till he (Staunton) returned, and read the final proofs.

All the Fates were unpropitious this day, however, for when Staunton had completed his meal, and was about to return to the office, Mrs. and Miss Coppleson were announced. They apologised for calling at such an unusual hour, but their excuse was that they had two or three other people to see in the course of the evening, and he was the first on their way. They were organising a bazaar in aid of the hospital funds, and required someone to act as treasurer. "Someone who could keep accounts, and would Mr. Staunton?" etc., etc. He, of course, accepted, and then the ladies, vowing they would not detain him, commenced to talk on a hundred different subjects. Miss Coppleson was so interested, in learning from a chance remark of his, that he had once been a successful amateur athlete, that she led him into describing one or two events which he had won, and finally, to exhibiting some of his trophies, and so an hour went by.

Meanwhile, whether impelled by the antagonistic Fates, influenced by Mr. Brady's bad example, or by some other cause, Mr. Wilkes felt an insatiable thirst steal over him, and, obeying when he ought to have resisted the impulse, adjourned to the nearest hotel with the intention of obtaining some ginger beer or other harmless beverage, before settling down to proof

correcting, but an acquaintance, whom he happened to meet there, unfortunately ordered brandy and soda, which Wilkes unthinkingly took. With him the first glass was the fatal one, and he was soon oblivious to *The Moon*, or anything else connected with astronomy, except, perhaps, the "stars" on the bottle from which he was repeatedly helped. Thus it came about that the proofs were not read at all, and with a good excuse at his command, Mr. Ben "made up" and printed off, and, in consequence, a remarkable issue of the paper was produced. The newsvendors' boys were waiting impatiently, as the paper was now very late, so as fast as the sheets were printed and put into bundles, they were seized by the boys, who rushed off at once, and Staunton, as he at length approached the office, heard the familiar cries, "Evenin' piper—*Moon—M-o-o-n!*" resounding on all sides. His conscience was uneasy, as the thought that he had suffered his attention to be distracted at a critical time crossed his mind, and it was with a somewhat guilty feeling that he accosted Ryan, who reached the office from the station at the same time as himself.

"Well, Staunton, so you managed all right, though you are a little late?"

"We have had a terrible time of it, for Brady has been away all day."

Ryan's face fell. "Brady away!" he repeated. "Who did the work, then?"



"Ben and the others."

"I hope they made no mistakes. Did you read all the proofs?"

"No."

"Who did, then?"

"Wilkes. At least, I left him to do so, while I went home to get some dinner. I was faint from hunger."

"It was risky leaving them, but I suppose it was all right."

On entering the office, however, they found that Wilkes was not there, and, in some anxiety, Ryan seized a paper, and went into his own room to read it, while Staunton, with another copy, retired to his. On glancing at the very first sheet, Ryan gave a gasp of horror, for an able and instructive article of his own, on the desirability of encouraging intense culture of small areas, was printed in this woeful fashion:—

In the early days of settlement when the primeval bush stretch'd from Wilson's Promontory to the Murray river where facilities of communication were practically existing and labour was scarce and. Dear large areas of land grazed over by herds of cattle and flocks of sheep suited well the conditions of the infant colony. In these days small however farmer working a few railways and roads with the assistance of his area family penetrating into the most distant counties results better squatter who than works old fifty acres indifferently thousand in the manner, and so on, and so on.

Dismayed, Ryan read other columns, only to find

more terrible errors still. An article headed "Presentation to the Member for West Stanley," ran thus :—

To mark their appreciation of the unceasing efforts he has made on behalf of the West Stanley to Hullabaloo Railway-line Bill, in the House of Representatives, the constituents of Mr. George H. Gassey, determined some months ago, to present that gentleman with his portrait in oils, and a purse of sovereigns. A committee was formed, as our readers will remember, subscriptions poured in rapidly, and yesterday the ceremony took place at the West Stanley Town Hall, in the presence of a large and representative gathering of citizens. In making the presentation, the chairman of the committee, Mr. F. T. Blatherskite, J.P., said that ever since Mr. Gassey had occupied the honorable and proud position of member for the district, he had earned the respect, the encomiums, the undying gratitude, of his constituents, whose interests he had made paramount to every other consideration (loud cheers). To enumerate 'all the good deeds that he had done,' as the poet beautifully remarked (applause), would be impossible in the course of a brief introductory speech like his (Mr. Blatherskite's), and besides it were needless to do so, for were they not written on the hearts of his fellow townsmen (cheers). He would, however, direct their attention to a few of Mr. Gassey's more recent achievements in their interests (hear hear). But for him the new Post Office, which had been promised for ten years, would have been shelved, with a lot of other Government promises (laughter) for another ten years, whereas now the building stood completed, an ornament to their town, the envy of other towns, and a lasting monument to the perseverance of their worthy member—"the West Stauley bull-dog," as he had once irritably been termed by a member of the Government. (Laughter, cries of "Hold on Gassey," and loud cheering). The approach to the station, which has long been a disgrace to the town, and an eloquent testimony to the

supineness of the Government, had at length been widened, drained, and macadamised, entirely through the efforts of their untiring member. (Cheers.) In connection with the great undertaking of establishing railway workshops in West Stanley, Mr. Gassey had again borne a prominent part. He had been convicted of drunkenness fifteen times, fined sums amounting in the aggregate to £540, for this offence, and imprisoned for terms ranging from 24 hours to 3 months. For assaulting the police five convictions stood against his name, and he received a sentence of four years' imprisonment with hard labor at Ballarat, for kicking a man in the face and breaking his jaw. This charge almost became one of manslaughter, as the injured man was seized with erysipalis, which almost had a fatal termination. His first offence was committed when he was not more than fifteen years of age. He had spent most of his adult life in gaol, and was in fact one of the worst characters in Victoria. West Stanley was proud of him, and was now endeavoring inadequately to pay a portion of her debt of gratitude.

The rest of the report was correct, but, turning to the Police Court news, Ryan found it there set forth that—

Timothy Jinks, a hawker, who appeared in court with his head bandaged, was charged with a violent assault on Constable Smiley, who was endeavoring to arrest him for drunkenness. Superintendent Walker, who appeared to prosecute, said that the prisoner resisted so violently that it required four constables to convey him to the station. His record was a very bad one. He had also been instrumental in bringing about the enlargement of the three schools in the district, and the completion of the new court house, which, in architectural beauty, now vied with any similar building South of the Line. (Cheers.) He had always been a staunch upholder of law and

order, and it was entirely owing to his representations that the police force of the district had been increased. Then when the question of Federation arose, they would remember how persistently he had urged the claim of Stanley to be the Federal city, and proved by a map drawn by himself, and published at great expense, that Stanley was the centre of civilised Australia. These acts marked him as indubitably their most prominent citizen. He, therefore, asked the magistrate to pass a heavy sentence.

Groaning, Ryan was about to search for fresh errors, when Staunton burst into the room, his eyes starting out of his head. "Here's a frightful mess, Ryan!" he almost yelled. "That scoundrel, Wilkes, can never have read the proofs, and the paper is bristling with errors. The advertisements are all wrong, and my report of Wednesday's cricket match is mixed up with the Bishop of Stanley's address to young men at the Y.M.C.A. Rooms. Listen to this:—

The Bishop, who was very heartily received, said that in these latter years of the century, a period to which the French had applied the term *fin de siècle*, it behoved them to look back and endeavor to realise what had been the result of trying to break from the off on a wet crease when there was no grip for the ball. The impetuous, the heedless, the worldly might exclaim, "Why look back? Why not always look forward?" but the sober-minded and thoughtful man, who knew that the future might, in a measure, be foretold from what had happened in the past, was knocked over the fence for four, three times in succession, and once into the grandstand, where a bevy of beauties, who were watching the game with much interest, received the flying intruder with little screams of alarm.

"Isn't that awful, eh, Ryan? And listen to this further on" :—

The ball, going at a pace which The Demon Bowler could scarcely have put on in his palmiest days, struck the Right Reverend gentlemen in the midst of his discourse, and shivered his off stump into fragments amidst shouts of applause from the delighted Stanleyites.

"And this is even worse" :—

It was irresistibly borne in on the mind of any one who had grasped the meaning of these great, these striking facts, that this condition of spiritual serenity could only be attained by those who kept always to the narrow, and perhaps rugged, path of strict rectitude and principle, but on Wednesday fully five hundred people obtained admission by climbing over the fences, an exhibition of petty meanness which, in a town like Stanley where scarcely anyone lacks the necessary shilling, was nothing short of disgraceful.

And again" :—

To faith must be added patience, the quality which distinguished Job of old. That much-tried man was caught in the slips when trying to snick a single off Jones.

"Isn't that terrible?"

"Awful," assented Ryan, and having ordered Ben to stop printing, the partners read the paper column by column, marking with red ink the errors, which were numerous, both in the news and advertisement columns. In the latter such mistakes were made as placing portions of one advertiser's announcement under those of another, with results like the following :—

**MESSRS. BROADCLOTH, TAPES & CO.**

Have pleasure in announcing their

**GREAT WINTER SALE.**

Amongst other Goods they will offer a **SPLENDID LOT** of  
**BELFAST LINEN SHEETINGS,**

and a **SPECIAL SHIPMENT** of

**HONEYCOMB QUILTS**

at Phenomenal Prices. . . .

Also a large selection of

PRIME BEEF SAUSAGES, 6d per lb.  
SHEEPS' TROTTERS—fresh every day.  
BRAWN (our own make.)  
SUET, 4d per lb.

Lowest Prices for Cash.

The District Bank was made to announce “Best Colonial beer, threepence per glass ; imported ales from ninepence per quart bottle ;” and the Bull and Mouth Hotel to notify that “The current rate for twelve months’ deposits has been reduced to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.” Braefenfell’s advertisement ran :—

J. B. BRAEFENFELL, Solicitor, extracts teeth painlessly with the aid of a local anesthetic, which he has successfully used for seventeen years without any more inconvenience to the patient than interest from  $6\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.

The Young Men’s Christian Association announced—

A GREAT glove match between S. T. Mahony (Broken Hill Sammy), and Tom Smith (Darkey) for Fifty Pounds and the Champion Lightweight Belt. Sammy to knock out Darkey in thirteen minutes by the watch,

while an advertisement setting forth that

THE Reverend H. Jones will discuss the question, "Is Sport Deteriorating Into Gladiatorialism?" and at its close ask for opinions from the audience.

appeared over the name of the proprietor of Pettigrew's Hall of Sport.

A well-known patent medicine advertisement was finished off with a line taken from an undertaker's announcement—

Funerals supplied at the shortest notice.

And there were numerous other errors, so arranged that they could not possibly have been the result of accident, and Ryan at once suspected design. Calling the confident Ben into the office, he showed him the misprints, all marked round with red ink, and asked how they had occurred. Mr. Ben glanced at the paper, and, instead of apologising or explaining, instantly waxed indignant, and said, "'Twasn't my fault. I couldn't do everything myself. There's too much for a man to do in this blooming shop."

"Well, there is one thing you can do," said Ryan; "clear out of this in five minutes."

"Oh! keep your hair on," was the answer; "I don't mind." And not caring two pence whether his employers were ruined or not by this day's work, he coolly put on his coat and walked out, whistling "Little Annie Rooney."

"That is a nice young brute," said Staunton. "And

he has left us in a pretty fix, for I do not suppose the others can go on by themselves.’”

“They will not go on, for the reason that they have gone off,” said Ryan, and so it proved, for directly they had heard Ben summoned, they departed without waiting to be discharged. This confirmed Ryan’s opinion that the mischief had been purposely brought about, either in a spirit of revenge for some fancied wrong, or in accordance with instructions received from an outside source—probably the latter—having regard to all the circumstances.

It was too late to adopt remedial measures now. All they could do was to discontinue issuing the paper for that night, so Ryan dismissed the few newsboys who still lingered, and then the partners took a survey of the deserted rooms. The lights were still flaring, the gas engine running, papers lay unfolded on the machines and tables, but there was not a soul in the place but themselves. The sudden loneliness and the silence which had fallen on the usually busy rooms were depressing to men already tired out, and they made haste to stop the machinery, and extinguish the lights, after which they retired to Ryan’s room in a melancholy humor indeed.

“It seems to me that *The Moon* has fallen from the sky with something like a thud,” said Staunton, with gloomy facetiousness, “for in an hour or two, a clean sweep has been made of our entire staff, and we have



probably some twenty libel actions to face. It is all my fault, and by my carelessness I have ruined you as well as myself," and he looked so abjectly miserable, that Ryan felt constrained to say, "Don't take it to yourself in that way. Your lapse was a slight one, but circumstances, as they frequently do, exaggerated the consequences. The best of us are liable to error, and Homer nods sometimes, you know."

"That does not excuse me, though. Besides, Homer never edited a paper ; if he had he would not have nodded."

"He may have conducted the *Trojan War News*," said Ryan, absently, and somewhat irrelevantly, and then relapsed into silence, while Staunton read, in imagination, the articles that would appear in the *Sun* and *Star* on the morrow. "What do you think of the position ?" he asked at last.

"This affair is very serious," replied Ryan, rousing up, "but not quite crushing. We shall be laughed at, and probably will lose business and money, but will not be hit for libel. The law is above suspicion, thank goodness, and a judge would see at a glance that there was no malice in any of the articles which read so badly. So keep your courage up, Staunton ; we are not quite beaten, and may yet give Sellbridge & Co. a run for their money. And now, let us go home ; I am tired out, and will sleep like a top."

"By the Lord, you are a philosopher," said Staun-

ton, in the words of Gascoigne to Mr. Easy, and Ryan replied, "I had to become a philosopher or a lunatic; an intelligent man has to choose between one or the other fate in this land of worry."

"Well, it strikes me that starting this infernal *Moon* smacks more of *luna-cy* than philosophy," said Staunton, which ghastly pun fittingly closed this disastrous day.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

MONEY comes to money like steel to a magnet, and every day saw fresh loans arranged by Sellbridge & Co., and someone's title deeds deposited in the firm's strong-room. So much valuable paper was stored there, in fact, that Mr. Whitegate entertained doubts of the wisdom of leaving the place entirely in charge of an ordinary caretaker, and one day suggested to Munks that he should live altogether in the building.

"I have no hob—that is *objection*, I'm sure," responded Munks, who was a bachelor, in the conventional sense of the term.

"Well, I think you had better move in as soon as possible. I will have the two rooms at the back of this furnished as a sitting-room and bedroom, and Mrs. Kellet, the caretaker's wife, will cook your meals for you." The new arrangement gave Munks increased advantages for prosecuting offensive operations against Herman, as formerly he had often found himself, after

a night spent at The Divan, or similar places of innocent amusement, unable to reach the office in time to "row" Herman if the latter were a few minutes late. Now, however, he could command the street from his bedroom window while dressing, and if he found Herman to be behind time, he could drag on a loose coat, and going into the office, "rate" the accountant, and then returning, complete his toilet, and have his breakfast at leisure. His eye was, therefore, only off Herman for brief intervals in the day, and the unhappy accountant was sorely tried indeed. He kept true to his promise to Staunton, however, and abstained from drink; and more than this, acting on his rescuer's advice, actually bought a second-hand bicycle, on which he essayed every evening to ride, to the immense joy of his offspring, who turned out in great force to see "Pa fall." Having amused them for a week by every conceivable fall known to the bicyclist, he succeeded in going to the end of the road—a distance of two hundred yards—with only two falls, and as he zig-zagged from one side to the other all the way, he calculated that he covered twice the distance, or about four hundred yards. This, extended to mileage, would give about nine falls to the mile, and as his former average was one to every three yards, he felt that he was getting on. The exercise benefited his health, and he began to regain confidence in himself, and a portion of the spirit which had been bullied out

of him by Munks. He began to look upon himself as quite a sporting character ; attended one or two cricket matches, and an athletic meeting, at which the bicycle races greatly interested him, and, finally, as a daring step, went to the Stanley races. Here he fell in with one or two acquaintances, took a share in a sweep-stake, and that evening arrived at "The Howleries" in triumph, with winnings amounting to three pounds ten in his pocket. His wife, who was somewhat exhausted by her nightly struggle to get the young Hermans to bed, heard his glowing account of the events of the day "inertly"—if the word can be used in such a sense—but had she been able to read the signs set forth in her husband's gleaming eyes and flushed cheeks, she might have been roused to anxiety, if nothing more. It was not given to her to read anything, however, so Herman was left free to erect *Chateaux en Espagne*, and dream of realising a rapid fortune, and freeing himself from Munks, and all his troubles, by one grand *coup*. From that day on a new passion took possession of his weak mind—that of gambling ; and many a pound did he invest, often with successful results, with Jim Todd, the East Stanley bookmaker, while Tattersall's great sweeps in Sydney had no more regular subscriber than he. To find funds for these adventures, or even to keep his position at all, would have been beyond his power, were Munks allowed to play a free hand, but Whitegate would hear of no dis-

missals, even when the office was to some extent overmanned by the arrival of a new clerk, who, like many others, had come from England with a letter of introduction from Harry Sellbridge. To the newcomer, a quiet young fellow named Joyce, Mr. Whitegate seemed to take a great fancy, and finding that he was not very experienced, put him to light work, such as paying in money to the bank, collecting cheques from the larger houses, etc. He would have given him some of the correspondence, but for the fact that Joyce wrote a very indifferent hand, in consequence of an accident that had disabled his right thumb. When Joyce had been in the office for some time, Mr. Whitegate said to him one day, "I am glad to see you are so careful and zealous in the discharge of your duties, and when you write to Mr. Sellbridge—you correspond with him, I suppose?"—queried the manager, raising his eyes to the young man's face for a moment.

"No, Mr. Whitegate, I do not write to Mr. Sellbridge."

"Then you are merely acquaintances?"

"Well, I know him well, but do not write to him."

"I think you ought to write, just to let him know that you have been taken on here. You can add that I am very pleased with your services, which I find most useful, and that I hope to find you a better position before long." Joyce thanked the manager

warmly for this kind promise, but the latter made a gesture of deprecation, and said, "I am only too pleased to do all I can for anyone who is recommended by Mr. Sellbridge, whose wish is law to me."

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE trouble caused by the misprints in *The Moon* proved more serious than Ryan had anticipated, for it brought a large amount of ridicule on the paper and its management, and ridicule and contempt being almost the same thing, a considerable loss of business followed. Many advertisers withdrew altogether; those whose announcements were misprinted had to be placated with a number of free advertisements; dozens of letters of regret had to be written; whole columns of apologies printed, and one libel action defended.

This was brought by the member for West Stanley, who persisted, in spite of the fullest explanations and most ample apologies, in holding that the report had been purposely made incorrect in order "to deal an underhand blow at my reputation as a public man."

"I should like to deal an overleg kick at his person as a private man," said Staunton, when he had read the letter concluding with the above phrase. "So should



I," said Ryan, "and it would be really a good action to twist that fellow's neck. He is the very type of man Australia *doesn't* want, for too many of his kind have already been bred out of the trading and money-hunting classes, which have descended on this country from Europe, like so many vultures. He is a character of the kind adored by the commercial Americans, a 'hustler,' always pursuing money or some material scheme. His one idea of public life, political or municipal, is 'boodle' for himself or his constituents, who must be an infernally corrupt lot, by the way, or they would never return him to the Assembly. So long as West Stanley gets a post-office or railway workshop he does not care a farthing what happens to Australia. He has about as much grasp of the real questions of life, and what constitutes a healthy nation, as a bandicoot, and when his colleagues and he go hence and commence trying to float a loan, for the purpose of substituting an iron bridge over the Styx, for Mr. Charon's obsolete ferry boat, as they will term it, they will leave a precious legacy of debt, confusion, and unhappiness to the future Australians. However, all this is not relevant to the present issue, and as it would be useless attempting to temporise with this bouncer, we will write, stating that we will defend any action that he may bring."

This was done, and Braefenfell instructed to defend the case, which was heard at the next sessions. As

Ryan had anticipated, the judge saw clearly that there was no malice in the matter, which was a pure mistake or misfortune, that had been most amply apologised for, and he directed the jury to find for the defendants, which they did, with costs against the plaintiff. Still, though they won the case, Staunton and Ryan had some unavoidable expense in connection with it, while it gave the *Star* an opportunity to sneer at "blunders only possible in an undertaking captained by tyros in journalism," of which it was not slow to avail itself.

Altogether, the affair hurt them seriously, and Staunton wished to dismiss Brady, but for whose lapse the trouble would not have arisen, but Ryan opposed this, as he knew the erring foreman to be an excellent man in every respect, save one. Moreover, the subsequent conduct of Mr. Brady had been good, for on the night of the mischief he, though three parts drunk, yet had sufficient sense to recognise the seriousness of the evil he had brought upon his employers, when he heard people in an hotel bar talking about and laughing at the mistakes in the paper. He immediately ceased drinking, went home to bed, and after a night's sleep was able to report himself for work in the morning. Ryan, who was at his wit's end to discover some method of getting the evening's issue out, hailed him with joy as a deliverer, and sent him off to engage some other printers, whom he said a local stationer

could spare for a day or two, and then sat down to his articles with a mind relieved of its most pressing burden.

Wilkes also turned up in the evening, remorseful and bitter against himself (as he always was on these occasions), and with a hand shaking so that he could scarcely hold his pen, wrote a scathing article on "The Drink Evil," which lost the paper seventeen hotel-keeping subscribers, and its largest advertiser, the local brewer.

New compositors were engaged next day through their Melbourne agents, and Ryan took care this time to secure a competent and reliable second, who could take Brady's place if the latter lapsed again. The new staff, though of much higher grade than the old, was, for that very reason, more expensive, and the slender capital of the partners felt the drain severely. When they had drawn all but £100 of the bank's advance, a fresh trouble arose, for Hardy, who had received repeated letters from the head office concerning this advance, called one afternoon, and said, "I have bad news for you, my friends. Definite instructions to call in that advance reached me to-day."

Staunton's jaw dropped when he heard this, and even Ryan looked uncomfortable for a moment, but he said, "That is bad, but not unexpected news, Hardy. And now I suppose you will have to write formally asking us to pay in four hundred pounds, and as, of

course, we cannot do this, I suppose you will come on our surety, Braefenfell?"

"Yes."

"Won't he swear!" said Ryan, chuckling even in the midst of his anxiety, as he thought of the lawyer's probable reception of the agreeable information that he would have to find four hundred pounds on account of other persons.

Braefenfell *did* swear. His clerks, used as they were to his ways, turned pale as they heard the roars which issued from his den a few minutes after Ryan entered, and several persons who called in reference to loans were warned to keep away, as their cases would be hopeless at present. With thumps on his desk, stamps on the floor, and shouts of anger, the lawyer anathematised Ryan, Staunton, *The Moon*, the District Bank—"a bankrupt institution, run by a lot of blackguards who ought to be in gaol"—Sellbridge & Co., himself, "for a fool," and, in fact, every person, and thing, concerned. This was merely blowing off steam, however, as he knew he would have to pay in the end, and presently he cooled down, and listened to Ryan's explanations.

"My paying will do *you* very little good," he said, "for the money goes to the Bank, of course, and it seems to me that you have no capital to go on with."

"Some hundreds of pounds are owing to us," said Ryan, "and we owe scarcely anything, except to you,

for I have made a practice of paying small debts promptly."

"That is good sense. A man to whom you owe seventeen shillings will worry you more than one to whom you owe £1700. How do you propose to proceed, then?"

"I thought of getting in all the money I could, and keeping going for a week or two, while I tried for financial assistance in Melbourne."

"But the paper ought to be paying its way?"

"It *would* be doing so only for that misprint trouble."

"Well, Ryan, you have made a good stand, and I do not like to see you crushed, so I will place £100 to your credit at the Southern Bank, which will leave you still owing me £500. If you don't pay it some day, I'll come down and seize that blessed rag of yours. It doesn't pay being soft," growled Braefenfell, relapsing into a surly tone again to interrupt Ryan's thanks.

This support of the lawyer's was kindly, but Ryan felt very uneasy about their position, for when the £100 was gone, they would be quite without reserve capital, and would be dependent on the weekly takings. But help was to come unexpectedly, and from a quarter that Ryan or Staunton would never have dreamt of.

They were discussing financial affairs in the office, when "a lady to see Mr. Ryan," was announced, and to their surprise, Miss Edith Forrester walked in,

looking very cool, fresh, and handsome in a becoming Spring toilette. She brought a sense of freshness to the dusty office, and a bunch of flowers at her breast reminded them that there were other things on earth than paper and ink, and bank overdrafts, and such *diablerie* of man's invention. She seemed a little, but not much, embarrassed at first, as she seated herself, and declared the object of her visit.

"You will, perhaps, think what I am about to propose to you a little unusual," she began, looking from one to the other; "but it will appear less so when I tell you that I have maintained myself and managed my own affairs for some years past. I have been constantly in my father's room during his illness, and, on several occasions, when his business friends called, I could not help overhearing scraps of conversation which led me to infer that you are not—pardon me—overburdened with capital, and are having something of a struggle to keep this literary venture of yours going." She paused, as if awaiting a reply, but Staunton, who was staring at her with an expression of blank surprise, said nothing, while Ryan grasped his chin with his left hand—a habit of his when perplexed—coughed, said, "Well, we——" coughed again, but got no further.

With a smile that showed her white teeth, and a quick glance of intelligence, she said, "I see. Of course, you are doubtful about taking me into your

business confidence, my father not being on your side——”

“ Really, Miss Forrester——”

“ You need not fear that I am allied with anybody in this affair. I am here on my own business entirely, and in order to bring things to a discussable point, I will advance my proposition, which is that I should join you as partner.”

Staunton’s surprise deepened into bewilderment at this, and his countenance assumed an expression of approaching imbecility, while Ryan, not easily moved to show his feelings, elevated his eyebrows till they almost mingled with his hair. “ To join us as a partner ! ” he feebly repeated.

“ Yes.”

“ Well, it is something quite out of the common—at least in my experience. Do you propose to put in capital ? ”

“ Yes ; and, further, to become a working partner.”

“ Oh ! ” said Ryan, while Staunton began to be haunted by vague fears that this strange lady would end her extraordinary proposals by a final one of a matrimonial nature, and offer to take over the whole property, paper, editor, *Viator*, and all. It did not come to this, however, and the visitor went on in her cool, business-like way.

“ I have had experience as a journalist, and my idea is briefly this :—Your journal, though very good in some

ways, is not, in my opinion, distinctive enough, and follows too much the track of the other two papers. Now, I thought that if a special page addressed mainly to women were added, it would secure a number of readers who are not reached at all now."

"You mean fashions?"

"No ; though I should give some space to fashions, which will always be dear to the female heart. I meant rather a page devoted to those subjects which thoughtful women elsewhere are now taking an interest in—the further emancipation of the sex, alteration of the marriage and other laws which now press so unjustly on them, and the general improvement in the status of women."

"Don't you think the subjects you mention would be terribly out of place in a Stanley paper ? All the women here are 'old'—hundreds of years old."

"That is because of their isolation. They have brains, and could learn like others."

"I don't know about that," said Ryan, gloomily. "If you can lift them above domestic concerns, frivolity, and dress, you will do a wonderful thing."

"You have a poor opinion of them. May I ask if you know many ladies in Stanley ?"

"About half-a-dozen."

"And from those you judge all the rest—'from the particular to the general,' eh ?"

"You catch me fairly, and, perhaps, I do the ladies



of Stanley an injustice. And now, what else do you propose to have in the page?"

"A serial story, and short tales by Australian lady authors, of whom there are an abundance; some discussion on books, art, music, the drama; and then household recipes, and all the usual etceteras of 'a ladies' page.'"

"Well, it is a comprehensive idea," said Ryan, "and I believe it would help the paper. You would edit, and do some of the work yourself for this page, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And as to the terms of the partnership, would you purchase a full third?"

"Yes, and I should like you to state what you consider a third share worth."

"To a working partner it would be worth £500, but it is only fair to tell you that our financial position is far from strong," and he then fully explained the condition of affairs to her. She listened attentively to the particulars, and then said, "You are very short of capital, and there is some risk, but I am willing to venture, for the work will suit me better than anything else I could find here, and I detest being idle." She clenched her hand and contracted her brows involuntarily as she spoke, and Ryan could see that she was brimming over with energy, and would be a most valuable aid to them; but Staunton, still bewildered,

could only think, "A Forrester wanting to find work—heavens !"

"I see no objection to what you propose, Miss Forrester," said Ryan, "if you are willing to take a little risk, and the money for your share will, undoubtedly, strengthen our position. What do you say, Staunton ?"

"Well, I—I should like a day or so to think it over."

"Take as much time as you like," said Miss Edith, rising. "I shall expect to hear from you when you decide. Good-bye, Mr. Ryan ; good-bye, Mr. Staunton." And with a hearty hand-clasp to each, she was gone in a moment, and they felt as if a ray of sunlight, or "a small flash of lightning," as Ryan put it, had vanished, leaving darkness behind.

"I am bewildered," said Staunton.

"And I am dazzled. That woman is a perfect column of electricity, if there is such a thing, and has force enough for three."

"But do you seriously think of accepting her proposal ?"

"Certainly ; it will be the making of us, and a good thing for her."

"But it seems deuced odd having a young and handsome woman like that working with us."

"We will make money out of the oddness, and to make money is the highest aim in life—according to commercial ethics, at all events."

"But what will people think?"

"Who the devil cares what they think? I am not going to order my life according to the rules and regulations of a lot of old women, who don't know why they do, or think, anything."

Staunton was very doubtful still, and said, solemnly, "She is too handsome."

Ryan grinned. "That is a bad fault in a woman, isn't it?" he said.

"In this case, certainly. Someone will be falling in love with her."

"Possibly, but she is not likely to fall in love with anyone on *The Moon* staff, except you, perhaps."

"Or you."

"Oh, I am safe. You yourself said I looked like a bushranger, or a pirate, even when I was got up in what I considered killing style."

"I was only joking then. Besides, women always feel interested in you saturnine, moody fellows; they think you are oppressed with some secret care, when, all the time, you are regretting that you had two helpings of duck for dinner."

Ryan laughed, and said, "I fancy Miss Forrester is not likely to cherish many illusions. And any way that is not a practical question, whereas her help and her money are two very practical questions indeed at the present time."

After further discussion, and when he had slept on

the matter, Staunton consented to the proposed arrangement, not because he did not adhere to his original opinions concerning it, but because of his inability to suggest any other method of securing the capital, without which they could not keep going. A deed of partnership was drawn up and duly signed by all three. Miss Forrester's cheque for £500 on a Melbourne bank was paid over, and the firm became "Staunton, Ryan and Forrester," though it would soon come to be "Forrester, Ryan and Staunton," the last named individual gloomily prophesied.

## CHAPTER XX.

WHILE these events were taking place, Mr. Forrester, Senior, made rapid progress towards recovery, and was on his feet again, and almost quite restored to health, when the bill for damages had only reached £17 14s 3d, so that his son's estimate expressed to Staunton proved to be £2 5s 9d over the actual total. This was, so far, satisfactory, and as there was now no reason for delaying further the marriage of Miss Forrester and Mr. Townsend, this event, which "all Stanley"—*i.e.* about 1 per cent. of the people in the town—was expecting, was again announced.

"I do believe Miss Forrester's going to keep her engagement this time," said Miss Williams to Staunton. "I suppose she thinks that if she goes on much longer she will be left for good."

"You are very uncharitable, Miss Williams. She is probably marrying the gentleman because of the love she bears him."

"Love"—with great contempt—"ow! now," and thus saying, she departed "daan taan," as she termed it, leaving Staunton to pursue the work of digging, which constantly occupied him now. Physical labor, besides checking his tendency to grow stout, was a relief from worry, he found, and he spent almost all his spare time in the garden, which had now assumed a highly-cultivated appearance. The lucerne had grown splendidly, and the "kyiow" was yielding gallons of milk, and growing fat into the bargain. Pausing a moment in his labor, Staunton saw, to his surprise, the bridegroom elect, Mr. Townsend, approach the gate and enter. "Haw-de-daw," said this last of the mashers as he came up. "Bai Jove! you aw hawd at work. Ai had no ideah you were fond of gawdning."

"I like the exercise," replied the other.

"Weally? It would be too hawd for me. Ai pwefer widing."

The object of Mr. Townsend's visit was to ask Staunton to be his best man at the forthcoming ceremony. "You see," he explained, "Tomlins, an awfly decent Johnny, was to have been mai best man, but when the wedding was postponed he had to return to Europe, and Ai am stranded, bai Jove, unless you stand by me. Ai am aware that your acquaintance with me is slight, but you are Anglish, you know, and I should—aw—like to have an Anglishman at my back on such an occasion."

Repressing a smile, Staunton consented to act, and with profuse thanks his visitor shortly afterwards departed.

Miss Williams was greatly delighted when she heard that Staunton was to play a part in the forthcoming ceremony, and asked him to bring her a piece of the wedding cake—"not to dream on—ow! now—but to tiste."

Ryan said that he would not go to see a couple of fellow creatures making unutterable fools of themselves. "You unthinking butterflies," he said, "go to this heavy tragedy with your minds prepared for a comedy, not recognising that in the condition of our out-of-date social system those two people, one of whom has no head, and the other no heart, are signing a contract which is practically indissoluble, and promising to love, honor and obey, and so on, for the term of their natural lives, each knowing nothing of the other, and not having the slightest knowledge that they are promising something that is absolutely impossible. Not all the laws of men can make two unsuitable people even tolerate, let alone love one another; and if our law makers knew anything of natural science—which they don't, and never did—no contract would be made indissoluble by mutual consent. No; I shall not go to this sacrifice. I should much more cheerfully attend poor Townsend's funeral; for then his troubles would be all over, whereas in the

case of this diabolical business you know they are just commencing, and commencing amidst complimentary speeches, toasts, congratulations, prophesies of 'happiness,' bumpers of champagne, and other frothy deceits which make the whole thing a mockery worthy of fiends.' This tirade was addressed to Staunton, who was greatly shocked thereby, and at once gave up trying to persuade Ryan to go to the wedding. But, nevertheless, that consistent individual *did* go, when his other partner asked him to do so.

The wedding was a tremendous success from a social point of view, for Mrs. Forrester had concentrated all her energies on making it so, and never since the foundation of Stanley were so many new dresses brought into the town.

"Five new costumes for Stanley," the manager of Cutter and Stiche's great establishment in Bourke-street, Melbourne, remarked, almost every morning as he opened the letters. "That town seems to have gone off it's head."

Each lady, as she learned that her neighbor had ordered a costume from Melbourne, determined to do likewise, if the condition of her purse or credit allowed her to do so ; but, if not, she stated decisively that "Melbourne dresses are very dear, and not a bit more fashionable than Miss Sower's. She gets her fashions direct from Home, and employs all the smartest girls in Stanley."



The various posting establishments in the town were laid under contribution for carriages, and the supply of horses running short, the liverymen were obliged to borrow from bakers and butchers—a fact which gave rise to some little trouble, as when a pair of horses harnessed to a Brougham wished, one to deliver bread, and the other meat, on opposite sides of the street, the only time they seemed to be of one mind being when they arrived at the “Tradesman’s Rest” Hotel, where they seemed quite willing to remain for an hour or so. The astonishment of these sagacious animals when they were halted opposite the principal church was very great, and the butcher’s horse, after craning his neck in looking every way for a reason, gave the riddle up in disgust, and, to relieve his puzzled feelings, bit the baker’s horse on the ear—an attention that was instantly replied to by a kick which missed its proper object, but “knocked two pounds’ worth of paint off the bloomin’ kerridge,” as the driver ruefully remarked.

Everyone said that Miss Forrester looked very handsome, and her charms were certainly in no way detracted from by any exhibition of nervousness ; indeed, she and her bridesmaids, Miss Davis, Miss Mary, and two younger girls, were models of coolness throughout.

Mrs. Forrester, who, if the truth were known, had been married in a dress that cost thirty shillings, made up for this enforced economy now by appearing in a

costume that cost nearly as many pounds, and excited the mortal envy of all her bosom friends—a fact which she plainly discerned, and was much gratified by. Mr. Townsend appeared without a wrinkle in any of his garments, and Staunton found himself regretting that he could not “photograph him down,” and make a “block” from him for advertising purposes.

The ceremony was conducted by the Bishop, and the lady promised to “love, honor, and obey,” with as much notion of doing any one of the three as she had of flying, and Townsend said, “With all my worldly goods I thee endow,” thereby parting with the mortgage on his farm, which was all that was really his, his remittance being dependent on the good-will of his elder brother in England.

When the mischief was over, Mr. and Mrs. Forrester did their best to shed a tear or two, but the lady only was successful, twenty years of banking having rendered the gentleman as dry as a plain in the Never Never Country. He could shake hands, however, and almost burst Mr. Townsend’s glove in the vestry, while assuring the young man that he had “won a treasure,” omitting, however, to state the precise value of the said treasure. As best man, Staunton came in for a portion of this “real” sentiment, and, at one stage of the proceedings, was under considerable apprehension that Mrs. Forrester meant to kiss him, but this proved groundless.

The procession swept out of the church, around which a considerable crowd had assembled, and a long line of carriages was soon moving in the direction of Mr. Forrester's house, with a certain irregularity of speed, due to the inability of the butchers' and bakers' horses to realise that this was "a day off" from their ordinary duties.

The wedding breakfast was "quite a brilliant success," as one gushing lady assured Mrs. Forrester, but to Ryan the speeches sounded as hollow and false as anything he had ever heard in his life, and the whole affair roused all that was cynical within him. He despised cheap cynicism, which he looked upon as a cover to weakness, ignorance, or malevolence, but he felt it impossible to be otherwise than cynical on the present occasion, and wished his fair partner had not induced him to come. She was sitting next him now, and he felt inclined to whisper a rebuke in her ear, but before he could do so, she said, softly, "I know, I know, but I fear you will find that insincerity and humbug are everywhere."

He looked at her in surprise, and asked, "How did you guess my thoughts?"

She smiled, and said, "That was easy."

Small wonder that Ryan was cynical, for, with the exception of the bridegroom's, not one of the speeches had any considerable quantity of truth in them from beginning to end. Mr. Forrester talked of "an affec-

tionate daughter, whose loss we will severely feel" (untruthful sniff of "grief" from Mrs. Forrester, and applause from the sincere guests, every one of whom knew that the bereaved parents were only too pleased to hand over the "affectionate daughter" aforesaid to anyone who would take her off their hands). Said the speaker, continuing, "She will, I am sure, be as good a wife as she has been a daughter"—("A blue look-out for Townsend," thought Ryan)—and then, skipping on to the easier grounds of general untruths, Mr. Forrester made a number of sage observations on "love" (an emotion of which he knew about as much as a water melon), and wound up with a brilliant peroration in praise of Townsend (whom he privately considered to be an ass).

Townsend, whose speech lasted four minutes, and was mainly made up of "aws" and "awflys," perhaps said what he really thought, but Staunton, in proposing the health of the bridesmaids, was as insincere as he could possibly be, for the two junior bridesmaids he did not know, and the seniors, Miss Davis and Miss Mary Forrester, who sat as unmoved and as unimpressible as a couple of statues, he really did not in his soul think would make exactly satisfactory wives for any men, and yet he "hoped to have the pleasure of officiating at future ceremonies, in which they bore principal parts," and so on, and so on, through a speech of five hundred words—"two hundred and

fifty of which were lies," Ryan afterwards told the speaker.

Later on a gentleman, who owed Mr. Forrester, in his managerial capacity, £10,000, and hated him like poison, stood up and delivered himself of an eulogium on "the father of the bride," that was most impressive and moving, and had no truth worth speaking of in it from opening to close.

But the unveraciousness and incincerity were not at all on the side of the gentlemen, for the ladies, being debarred by custom from speaking untruths, acted them. When the bride was about to depart, fully a dozen ladies, who could have eaten her for very jealousy, kissed her instead, with the warmest affection, while her mother, whose shallow brain was bursting with exultation at the success of the affair, and joy at "getting rid of Emily" (the numerous engagements of that young lady had brought her very near what, in the villainous parlance of those mischievous people, the match-makers, is termed "the shelf"), wept copiously—the champagne having stimulated her lachrymal glands—and, at the moment of parting, was so overcome that she had to be supported by her son Jack, who, in consequence of the attentions he had paid to Messrs. Moet et Chandon, was not at the moment a very reliable support.

Altogether, for all-round glitter, froth, and falsity, the wedding of Miss Forrester and Mr. Townsend could

not readily be surpassed, and Ryan was hugely relieved when the bride and bridegroom had departed, and he was free to go back to the office with Staunton, on the truthful plea that the paper had to be got out.

## CHAPTER XXI.

RYAN's, rather than Staunton's, expectations concerning the new partnership were justified by the event, for Miss Edith conducted her part of the work with such ability, that the paper was raised from the level of a mere country "chronicler of small events" to that of a medium of education to its readers, and a leader of thought in the district. The novelty of the new partnership powerfully impressed the Staunley people, and was "a howling fine advertisement," in the words of Ryan. It excited much comment, and the married ladies discussing the subject, with the proverbial acumen and freedom from prejudice of their kind, arrived at the unanimous decision that it was "shocking." "For a young woman to enter into partnership with two men, and to work in the same office with them all day, and up to a late hour in the evening, was dreadful. But then what could you expect from the second Miss Forrester—of course, you know her story ?

No? Well, she——” And then the tale would be repeated to another interested listener. All this helped the paper; the circulation went up to double the former maximum, and drapers and others, finding that it was largely read by women, used its columns freely for their announcements.

Wilkes carried of dozens of orders beneath the noses of the despairing canvassers of the *Sun* and *Star*, and as *their* incomes fell off, *his* increased, till he found himself the possessor of three suits of clothes for the first time for eleven years, and also in a position to flaunt a watch and chain, and a new silk umbrella. Printing orders flowed into the office as the paper became more widely known, and all day long the gas engine was whizzing and snorting, and the machines rumbling and clicking, while Mr. Brady was in that condition of high pressure which would kill any other man than a printer, but under which members of that extraordinary business wax fat and contented. As a consequence of all this, money began to flow in freely, and the partners felt more easy than had been the case with them since they started. They were, however, by no means free from anxiety—people with small capital can never be so—for the larger volume of work greatly increased expenses, and there being no considerable margin of ready cash, receipts had to meet expenditure.

By living frugally and working hard, however, they



managed, as time went on, not alone to meet expenses, but accumulate a few pounds in the event of an emergency, or a fresh move on the part of the enemy, for Ryan well knew that their growing success and possession of a power that had already enabled them to cripple Perkins must be gall and wormwood, and a constant menace to Whitegate and Munks.

Miss Edith was "a wonder to work," as Staunton was obliged to admiringly admit. She had a room set apart for her own use, and here she sat all day, and until late at night, writing, reading manuscripts, correcting proof sheets, and performing all the drudgery of press work, not alone willingly, but apparently with positive enjoyment. Ryan was one day surprised by a request from her that he would allow her to take up some of his editorial work, which the constant interruptions of callers on business rendered it almost impossible for him to overtake. He demurred at first, but she insisted, and soon was doing a full third of the work, if not more. This kept her so continually occupied that she rarely went home to luncheon or tea, and, in fact, only saw the inside of the Forrester villa from nine or ten at night to the breakfast hour in the morning.

Sunday, however, she had to pass in the paternal mansion, and that day dragged more than all others, for there was no avoiding the family mid-day dinner, and the visitors who generally came to the "meat tea" of that day.

Happening to let fall a remark to Ryan on the dullness of the first day of the week, he invited her to dine with Staunton and himself on the next Sunday. Staunton was surprised when he heard of this invitation ; and Miss Williams said, " A lidy coming to dine with you ? Well, I never !" But Ryan seemed to think there was nothing in the least unusual about the matter, and their guest, when she arrived, was as calm and unembarrassed as ever, and they spent a very enjoyable day and evening. It was late when she returned home, and Mr. Forrester, who sat up to let her in, looked at her with a disapproving eye, but she simply bade him a calm " good night," and retired.

A few days after this, Mr. Whitegate called at the bank and had an hour's conversation with Mr. Forrester on various important matters, and that evening the latter called his daughter into the little room he called his " study " (but in which there was nothing to study unless it was the pattern of the paper), and bidding her sit down, said, " Edith, you know that when I consented to forget the past and receive you here, I expected you to act with circumspection."

She looked at him with surprise, and said, " I made no promise about anything, but simply came back, and asked you if you had any objection to my remaining for a time, and, after a consultation with mother, you said, ' No,' and that was all."

" But, of course, there was a tacit understanding

that you would—would be careful in your—your—” Mr. Forrester stammered sadly, though he could usually convey his ideas easily—“your conduct—your method of living.”

“I am not aware that there is anything in my conduct, or method of living, that the most rigid could find fault with.”

“But your present position. This business you have gone into without consulting me.”

“Well, what of that?”

“It is not right, it is not—not proper for a young lady to join men in business, to work with them all day, and half the night, in a newspaper office. And then you make the matter worse by visiting them at their home. It will not do; it is exciting remark in the town.”

“Has someone been speaking to you about it?”

“Well—yes,” hesitatingly.

“Whom?”

“Ahem! Mr.—, a responsible client of the bank. He said I ought not to allow it, and, in point of fact, made me promise that I would stop it.”

“And what concern was it of his?”

“I—I—well, as a leading citizen, a man who is bound to endeavor to—hum—ah—to influence for good the tone of the city.”

“What is the name of this good citizen?”

“I am not at liberty to tell you.”

" Luckily for him. Your reticence has saved him a whipping."

" What ? "

" What I said. And further, I say that if I discover his name, a whipping he shall have, as sure as my name is Edith Forrester." Mr. Forrester sat like a man in a dream while she went on in extreme indignation, " The insolent Pharisee, to interfere in what is no concern of his, and, my heaven ! to arrange my code of behaviour for me. A pretty pass I have come to if I am to follow the rules of life laid down for me by some commercial mediocrity whose brains are in inverse ratio to his bumptiousness."

" This must not go on," said Mr. Forrester, rising up in his chair in horror. " I can't have it. You must not talk like this, and act as you have been doing. You—you must leave Stanley."

" Leave Stanley !" she said in surprise. " And why, pray ? "

" Because—because I cannot go against my customer like this, and I order you to go."

Edith's temper got the better of her.

" Pooh ! nonsense," she ejaculated, with a stamp of her foot that made him jump. " A fig for your customer. You can order me to leave this house if you like, and I will go. In fact I will go anyway, but I shall stay in Stanley till the day of my death, if I choose, and just let me hear of any pharisaical gentle-

man interfering in my affairs again. He will wish he had attended to his own business. I will not listen to another word now," and she walked out, leaving Mr. Forrester in that condition of mind described by the vulgar word, "flummuxed."

Next day Edith told Ryan what had occurred, and he, on hearing that Mr. Forrester had been spoken to by some outside person, knit his brow, and said, "Another move of the enemy."

"Do you mean that my father was urged to endeavor to detach me from this business with a view of working you an injury?"

"Yes."

"Then who ever it was had his trouble for nothing, for my father has absolutely no power over me. My money is my own, left me by a dear friend in England on her death, and he does not even know how much I possess."

"Or what you put into this business?"

"No. I told no one, and I bank in Melbourne."

"Very wise. You are a thoughtful fellow—I beg your pardon!" he continued, reddening—"I really forgot for the moment that you were not a man."

She laughed. "Because I am business-like, and 'canny,' I suppose, but a woman can be so, just as well as a man."

"Evidently. And now I suppose you will be leaving your father's house?"

"Yes. I never intended to stay there for any length of time, and would have left before, only that I joined you."

"You do not find yourself in very congenial society?" said Ryan.

"No. Singularly enough, my people and I do not seem to have a feeling or trait in common. They are much more strangers to me than others, which is not pleasant, as one gets the credit of being hard and unkind when there is no such intention. It does not necessarily follow that, because people are of one family, their tastes should be at all similar, and yet there is a sort of understanding in the world that they should agree, or make believe to do so."

"That is more so with women than men, and 'tis great nonsense in either case. But, knowing that you could not get on with your own people, I wonder that you returned here at all."

"Well, I wished to make certain that my early impressions were correct, and, moreover, felt drawn to the place by some indefinable feeling. And now I shall have to leave you. I have yet to arrange for rooms, as I mean to leave the villa at once."

"Are you sure you are doing the wisest thing? Will you not be lonely?"

"I am far less lonely by myself than in uncongenial society. And now, good-bye for a while," and, with a smile and nod, she left him to write an article on "The

improved tone of business in Stanley," which, in his present mood, was about as agreeable work as selling whisky and other fluids, to the detriment of mankind, would have been. Miss Edith secured rooms that very day, and immediately took up her abode therein with great content, and a sense of relief. The news that she had left her father's house soon spread through Stanley, and a cabinet council of matrons was hurriedly summoned, and, after a brief discussion, the decision was come to that she must be "dropped;" and dropped she was, to her great delight. Society then waited patiently for her to provide it with a toothsome scandal, and one middle-aged satyr, in his imbecility and brutal inability to understand a character like hers, had the temerity to write to her, offering himself, and a portion of his wealth, as the means for furnishing the expected scandal. Not receiving any reply, he accosted her in the street, and was rebuffed with a vigor and contempt that would have impressed anyone less debased. No verbal rebuff affected him, however, and having by long experience acquired a dreadful patience in this kind of pursuit, he waited for a time, during which he constantly followed her at a distance, and at length accosted her again, to be instantly lashed across the face with a riding whip, brought like lightning from its concealment under her cloak, and laid on with a right strong arm, though it was a woman's. Half blinded, he staggered back, and

endeavored to escape, but slipping, fell on the pavement, where, as he lay, he was the recipient of a whipping that marked him with black and blue wheals from head to foot, and afforded so much delight to Ryan, who came on the scene just then, that it was with the very greatest difficulty he refrained from taking up in his arms, and kissing his business partner, who, with flushed cheek and sparkling eyes, never appeared to better advantage than now, when she was vindicating her rights, as a citizen of a free country, to live unmolested in her own way, when that way did not interfere with the rights of others. From that day on, she was never troubled again, and a few people here and there began dimly to recognise that though she set most of their preconceived notions at defiance ; possibly *she*, and not the notions, might be right. She was indifferent to the world's opinion, however, so long as her reason was satisfied that her methods were right, and went calmly on her way, cool, self-contained, and self-sustaining.



## CHAPTER XXII.

MUNKS, who was much given to prowling about the streets at unholy hours, was, one night—or rather morning, for it was 1 a.m.—passing Mrs. William's house, when, to his surprise, he saw Joyce, Mr. Whitegate's latest favorite, emerge from the gateway, and walk rapidly towards the town. "Now, what the dooce does this mean?" thought Mr. Munks, as he watched the retreating figure. "There ain't anyone but our two troublesome friends boarding in that house, and it must be them yon chap has been visiting. By gum! Whitegate won't be too well pleased to think he is being given away by one of his clerks like this. I must tell him about this in the morning."

He did so, and the communication seemed to make some impression on Whitegate, for he said, "You are not mistaken, I suppose?"

"I couldn't be," replied Munks. "The light from a street lamp shone in his face as he came out, and I saw him as plainly as I see you now."

“ It may be only some sporting friendship with that young Staunton, but it will be as well to be watchful, and you had better keep your eyes open. And now, how about Bolton’s case ? ”

“ Well, it is pretty far advanced. Thompson is pressing him, and the assignment of his property to Morley being, as we know, informal, we will be in possession very shortly.”

“ Very good ; hasten it as much as possible. Have you transferred Hicks and French’s loans to the company ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Good. That will be sufficient for a week or two, as we have been going rather fast lately.”

Munks now transferred a good deal of his attention from Herman to Joyce, and the former had a respite from persecution, while Joyce went on his quiet way, unconscious of the sub-manager’s espionage, which was not rewarded by the discovery of anything against the young man.

Ryan, about this time, received a visit from Hardy, the banker, who said, “ You will be surprised to hear that I am your manager again.”

“ How so ? We have done with that tinpot institution, the District Bank, for ever, I hope.

“ Exactly ; and so have I, for I am now manager of the Southern Bank, at an improved salary, which I may say I owe to you.”

“To us?”

“Well, the withdrawal of your account, though it was so small, caused a pretty rumpus. You wrote a neat letter of sarcasm yourself, and Braefenfell followed with a perfect scorcher, which must have made the directors feel hot when they read it. He withdrew his account, which was the best on our books, and not content with that, came into my room, and swore at me till the atmosphere smelt of brimstone. I couldn't stop him, and he couldn't stop himself in the end, and it was only when he had a sort of mild apoplectic seizure that I got an opportunity of assuring him that I personally was not to blame. He apologised then; said he always knew that I was the best fellow South of the Line, made me go and partake of strong drink with him, and finally advised me to leave this ‘bung concern,’ as he called the bank, and go over to the Southern, where he promised to use his influence for me; and I did, and there I am.”

“I congratulate you,” said Ryan, “and am glad you are over us, so to speak, once more, though we don't want any help from you now.”

“You never know when you may want money, and the knowledge that a few hundreds are available from me will, at all events, be comforting to you.”

“I am much obliged to you,” said Ryan, and shortly afterwards he had reason to be thankful that Hardy's offer was available.

Braefenfell had a wonderful knack of learning what was going on in "financial circles," and scarce one of those "moves" and shuffles, which the predatory classes are so constantly making, escaped his notice. He was a money-lender himself, but a "decent" money-lender (if there can be such a thing), a man who only lent on good security, for the *bona fide* purposes of industry and improvement, and never charged more than seven per cent. for a loan, which, in Australia, could not be considered an excessive rate. He saw nothing wrong in money-lending—few people do—but he did not approve of the operations of Ben Israel and Co., and other cent. per centers—not all of the Lord's chosen people, by the way—and he watched their transactions with a keen eye.

Being aware of Braefenfell's peculiar knowledge, Ryan immediately accepted as correct a piece of information from the lawyer which, cool man as he was, fluttered him considerably, and caused the utmost consternation to his partners when he repeated it to them. They had very little time to act, for a blow was impending, which presently fell. One afternoon, within an hour or so of the time when the paper was issued, a great trampling of feet was heard in the outer office, and with a loud knock on Ryan's door, Mr. Thomson, of the Land Mortgage Company, unceremoniously entered, followed by two other men.

"Good-day," he said. "You are Mr. Ryan?"

"Yes."

"I must inform you, then, that I have come to take possession of these premises, and the printing plant, under a distress warrant."

"But we have a lease of the premises and plant from Mr. Morley," said Ryan, with a look of astonishment.

"He had no power to lease it."

"He was the owner."

"He never was. Mr. Bolton owned the premises."

"But Bolton assigned to Morley."

"The deed of assignment was never registered, and has been set aside. We are creditors of Bolton's, and having secured judgment against him, are, in default of satisfaction of the same, seizing these properties under a distress warrant, as I said."

"You have satisfied yourself that your legal position is good?" said Ryan.

"Most certainly. We should not risk a step like this if we had not."

"Well, we will, of course, inquire into it. But there is no time to do so now, and, therefore, I suppose there will be no objection to our continuing in possession as heretofore? If you are now the proper owners, it must, of course, be an advantage to you to have paying tenants like ourselves.

"We do not intend to let the premises just now."

"Then you will place us in a very embarrassing

position," said Ryan, "for we shall not be able to find suitable offices in Stanley."

"Oh! You can build offices and buy a plant," replied Mr. Thomson, with a shadow of a grin on his features.

"We can't afford to do that."

"Really?" with an air of surprise.

"No. But it is possible that we could get a printing plant from a Melbourne firm, and find temporary premises in a week or two. You will, I presume, have no objection to our going on so long here?"

"Well, we have an objection, and not to detain you too long, I have come to take possession as from this hour."

"But we are just about to publish this evening's issue of the paper," said Ryan in dismay.

"I can't help that."

"We shall be ruined."

"Can't help that, either."

"Think what you are doing—bringing about the ruin of people who never did you any harm; people just making a start in life, too."

"When you have reached my age, and attained my experience, Mr. Ryan, you will know that there is no friendship in business."

"Or mercy?"

"No; but I can't stop talking here all day. I have come to take the inventory, and must get to work."

Ryan sighed, and after a moment asked, "May I remove my private papers?"

"At present you may not remove anything. Afterwards, when the things belonging to Mr. Bolton's estate have been enumerated and certified to, you may take away all your private property. You had better advise your partners, and the men of this, also."

"My partners are not here."

"Then they may as well stay away for the present, as they cannot remove anything, and will not be admitted to the premises. Jobbins, go on with the inventory, and put Syme at the outer door, with instructions not to let anyone in, or anything be taken away, without an order from me. And, Jobbins, call in Mr. Munks."

"What has Munks to do with this affair?" demanded Ryan.

"A good deal. Sellbridge's are interested in Bolton's estate with us."

"And a good many other estates, I fancy."

"That is our look out, and I am not here to answer your questions."

"Answer nothin', Thomson," said Munks, who now entered. "But turn him out."

"You turn me out, you dog!" Ryan exclaimed, when Thomson interfered.

"Come, come! This threatening language won't do. We heard all about your bouncing last time, but you can't do it twice. Clear out now."

“ I shan’t go a foot.”

“ We’ll see about that. Jobbins—Smith—put this man out.”

“ The first man that touches me dies that moment,” cried Ryan, rising, and placing his hand in his hip pocket (in which he had a most deadly weapon in the shape of an old briar wood tobacco pipe, which Staunton often declared was “rank enough to kill a man.”) “ I shall stay here for a reasonable time. I am in no way resisting your distress warrant, and it gives you no power to eject or molest me, so what you do, you do on your peril.” The men drew back, and Munks said, “ Well, give him ten minutes. And now let us get on with the inventory. Jobbins, you take down the things in this room, and we’ll do these others. Ha ! This is the lady’s boudoir,” he exclaimed, as he walked into the next office, where a few flowers in a tumbler and a certain air of tidiness were evidences of a woman’s occupation.

The practised broker’s men rapidly made a list of the contents of the offices, and then proceeded to the printing room.

“ The place seems d——d bare !” exclaimed Munks. “ There are no books or papers, and I don’t see any men. What does it mean ?” he asked, blankly, turning to Thomson.

“ It means, Mr. Munks,” said Ryan, who had followed, “ that you are euchered again. Allow me



to present you with an advance copy of this day's *Moon*, issued, as you will see, from our new offices in South-street. Having purchased a completely new plant and type of the very latest pattern, we are able to produce the journal in greatly improved style, as you will observe. We shall be very pleased to enroll you as subscribers, or to quote you for advertisement spaces, from half-an-inch to three columns." This speech, in the tone of an advertisement canvasser, was delivered with a broad grin, directed to Messrs. Thomson and Munks, who stood regarding the speaker with a look in which fear was blended with dismay, and listening to the cries of "Evenin' piper, *Moon, M-o-o-n*," which now began to rise from the newsboys in the streets.

"Yes, gentlemen," went on Ryan, "You are beaten once more, and, in my opinion, are—Mr. R. T. Whitegate included—but clumsy tacticians at best. We are fighting you with our little finger, so to speak, and acting only on the defensive. *Beware of us when we employ all our energies, and act on the offensive!* You are treading on very dangerous ground, and should step warily. Good-day, gentlemen," and Ryan walked off, charging his "revolver" with tobacco, as he went, while Munks and Thomson stared blankly at one another.

"That fellow is the devil," said the former, wiping his clammy brow.

"He is a dangerous man," said Thomson, slowly. "But he could not do all this by himself, and must be aided by others."

"Of course he is. Braefenfell, the lawyer, the 'cutest man in Stanley, is with him, and there must be others supplying money, otherwise this paper could not be kept going. Whitegate underrated these people altogether, and I'll tell him he had better give up struggling with them."

"He can't do that," said Thomson, in a whisper (they had retired into one of the inner rooms). "If they have begun to entertain suspicions, as from that fellow's last words I fear they have, he must beat them, or they him."

"He'll be beaten," said Munks, whose face had changed from a sort of mottled brown to a dull grey, "and we will be done for. I won't stay here, Thomson, I'll clear out."

"Nonsense, man, you daren't. Whitegate——" here his voice sunk to a whisper, barely audible even to Munks, who, like a chameleon, changed color once more, this time to a sort of "drab," which was the nearest tint to white that his rugged face was capable of assuming.

For some weeks after this, there was a gloom on the spirits of Mr. Munks, that was scarcely dissipated even when he found an entry in the cash book which Herman could not possibly explain away on the ground of error, as he had on a former occasion.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE new printing machinery purchased by Ryan, when Braefenfell warned him of the intended attack, was of the latest pattern, for plenty of funds had been available from Hardy, and another source. This, with the more convenient arrangement of their new premises, enabled them to execute printing orders with a rapidity and in a style that could not be equalled in the town, and in consequence they experienced a further increase of business, and were able to discharge the greater part of their debts. They were allowed to prosecute their work in peace, for the last defeat had been a severe one for Messrs. Whitegate, Munks & Co., who, besides having failed in their object, had incurred heavy legal expenses, and what they disliked even more, directed public attention to themselves. Under all these circumstances their wisest policy was to remain quiet till the affair was forgotten, and they determined to do so.

The editorial work of the paper was now almost entirely

in the hands of "Edith," as her partners at length came affectionately to term her, and "a jewel of an editor" she was, in Ryan's words—patient, careful, judicious, and even-tempered. Old Brady would take the very greatest care to prepare proofs for her that were absolutely clean, and her simple "Thank you, Mr. Brady," sent him back to his press smiling and pleased with himself and the world. Since her arrival he had not lapsed once, and Wilkes had only broken his solemn vow of temperance twice in six months, whereas his former average was once a month or thereabouts. On the occasion of the second of these ruptures, he first "liquidated" all the money he possessed, then his watch, then the silk umbrella (the pride of his heart, and envy of his brother canvassers), then two of his three suits, then the waistcoat of the third, and then his boots—or more correctly the surplus which his foot wear realised, over and above the value of a very "seedy" pair for which, with a little cash, he exchanged them. In a civilised country it seems to be difficult to drink further than the waistcoat, for inebriates seem generally to stop at that garment. *They* would willingly go on till they had sold their very skins for the poison, but the pawnbroker, or the police, or the hotelkeeper, no doubt, interfere when the waistcoat limit has been reached. When Wilkes had swallowed this, his last negotiable garment, he, as usual, made back to the office, in order to obtain some

money wherewith to purchase clothing, food, and lodging, preparatory to making a fresh start on the weary road, which merely led him to the top of a new precipice, down which he inevitably fell into the horrid abyss once more.

Staunton was usually the Good Samaritan who supplied the necessary funds, but he was absent on this occasion.

“Mr. Ryan, then?” demanded Wilkes, though he dreaded the searching glance of the stern Irishman.

“He is out, too,” replied the boy who answered his questions.

“Brady is in, I suppose?”

“No. He has gone with the bosses to look at a machine they are thinking of buying.”

“Is no one in then?”

“Yes; Miss Forrester.”

Wilkes was in a miserable condition. His teeth were chattering, though the weather was warm, and he was almost fainting with weakness, for he had eaten little or nothing for several days, and desperate, therefore, and sorely ashamed, he reluctantly advanced to the editor's door.

She looked up as he entered, and beheld a woeful sight, and one 'twere kinder to the reader not to describe, for the besotted creatures who have spent days in the throes of alcoholism are like nothing Nature produces, but might well suggest apparitions newly

arrived on earth after a residence amongst the damned. As for her, to his unsteady vision, she seemed like an angel—so pure and serene, so utterly, so terribly, different to him was she.

“I’m—I’m very sorry, Miss Forrester,” he began.

“You need not say anything, Mr. Wilkes. I well know that you suffer from a disease which you loathe more than any of us, who cannot even imagine what its pangs are like. I know you do your best to fight against it, for Mr. Staunton told me so the last time you were seized. You had better get some food now, and then, after a good night’s rest, you can obtain fresh clothes. You will want an advance of your wages, I suppose?” And taking out her purse, she placed three sovereigns in his shaking hand. Treatment so different to what he had expected overcame poor Wilkes completely, and he almost sobbed as he said, “Thank you. Oh! thank you, Miss Forrester, for your kindness. Oh! if you knew the agony of degradation I suffer during these attacks! But I will try—I will try, with all my strength, to overcome this disease, and, if I succeed, you will have been the cause of my victory. God bless you!” And the poor wretch shuffled out, leaving the editor troubled with a slight cough and redness about the eyes which in so strong a person could only have been caused by sitting in a draught.

Wilkes arrived next morning, spick and span, and

bearing a huge bunch of flowers, which Edith found in her room, and gratefully thanked the donor for, to his immense delight.

On all the members of the staff she exercised a beneficial influence, and even Ryan, in his most despondent moods, would find her presence cheering and pleasant. Outside she was still "cut" by the Stanley matrons, but every line that appeared above the initials "E.F." was read with interest, and a story under the same letters was exciting such interest, that the issues of the day it appeared (Saturday), had to be first doubled, and then quadrupled; thousands of copies going to towns and districts which no Stanley paper had ever before reached.

"She has made a success in quarter the time we would have taken, and without 'E.F.,' *The Moon* would be nothing," said Ryan to Staunton.

"That is true," replied the latter; "and I must bow to your superior sagacity in wishing to take her as partner, when I was against it."

"I saw she was full of energy," said Ryan, "and now we find that she has not alone made a financial success for us, which is a minor matter, but what is infinitely more important, she has refined and humanised us all. Look at old Brady; he has not given way to drink once since she came. Wilkes is making a game effort to conquer his diseased nerves; all the men and boys in the office work better than

they used to before, and never by any chance swear, or give way to rowdyism in the office, while even on you and I she has an influence for good—on second thoughts, not so much on you, for another lady did the business in your case (Staunton reddened slightly), but on me the effect has been wonderful. I was in danger of becoming a despondent sloven, with no interest in life. Now I feel as if I should like to live, and do some good for my fellow men.”

Staunton smiled. “Edith has evidently wrought a wonderful transformation, for, if I remember rightly, you had rather a ‘down’ on the sex.”

“I certainly had a down on the very married British matron type of woman, who has always seemed to me a very gin-like creature, ready to humbly obey the male animal, who, in return for her body and soul, gave her food, clothes, and, what her little mind loves more, a ‘position.’”

“You are very hard on the British matron—too hard.”

“Possibly ; and, of course, there are exceptions. But the majority have always seemed to me perfectly willing to remain comfortably in their own shelters, chewing the cud of selfish content, attending perhaps to their offspring, and letting the world better itself if it could, or go to the deuce if it couldn’t.”

“Mr. Ryan, I am shocked ; you almost compare the mothers of our race to cows.”



“ Well, perhaps old hens cackling on nests would be better objects of——”

“ Worse and worse. But what is your opinion of the Irish matron ? ”

“ When I talk of the British matron I mean English, Irish, Scotch, Welsh, Canadian, Australian, Afrikander. They are all the same ; white gins——”

“ My word, if some of your countrywomen heard you now, they’d tear your eyes out, bedad ! ”

“ Not they. The poor slaves have not even spirit enough for that. The Irish matron is perhaps the most hopelessly gin-like of the lot.”

“ You are awful, and evidently you care only for women who, like our fair partner, have a little (don’t get angry) of the termagant about them.”

“ You are hopelessly steeped in the old errors concerning women. Edith has not an atom of the termagant about her, naturally. She is simply strong and self-reliant.”

“ Oh, come. Look at the way she whipped that fellow, and rounded on her father.”

“ In the present state of society she is obliged to show fight occasionally, in order to protect herself in her isolated position ; but by-and-bye, when society is reconstructed, and women like her take their true position, there will be no necessity for any display of aggressiveness. Anyway, termagant or not, she has humanised us in a way that fifty soft—not to say

flabby—British matrons would not have done. Her example gives me the very greatest hope that the women of the future will regenerate humanity, for if one woman can refine a printing office filled with canvassers, drunks, dyspeptics, and soft-headed Anglo Saxons (with a grin in Staunton's direction,) there is surely ground for hoping that fifty million such women could humanise the portion of the race which has evolved far enough to be susceptible to other influences than those of brute force. I have great hopes of the coming woman, as I said, and, with apologies to Carlyle, would have despaired of human nature but for her, and would have joined the great army of hopeless ones, cried with them *Cui Bono*, and probably cut my throat. I am talking seriously," he continued, as Staunton smiled, "and am serious more frequently than you imagine. You fellows with the big hearts and muscles, and small heads——"

"Confound your impudence!" ejaculated his listener.

"I beg your pardon—moderately large heads, do not know what pain is suffered by those who look abroad, and witness the apparent futility and agony of humanity's struggle. Look at your 'successful man,' as the barbarous world of to-day calls the creature who, by superior strength and cunning, has succeeded in securing for himself an undue proportion of plunder. What is he but a brutal fighting

man—an Alexander, pursuing, like the ruthless Macedonian, conquest for conquest's sake, overthrowing and trampling under foot his weaker fellow creatures. It is some consolation to know, though, that he does not score, for when he arrives at the goal of his ambition, he has secured only gold, a position, which he has the strain of acting up to every day he is alive, and the hatred and envy of his fellow men. True, he can enjoy the pleasures of the senses to the fullest degree, but, as every sensible man knows, the nerves on the existence of which the pleasures depend were only supplied in order to secure the proper nutriment of the frame, and the perpetuation of the race, and quickly become exhausted by excess. The longer I live the more am I convinced that the pursuit of mere material ends secures no happiness for the individual, and when a nation is given over solely to such pursuit, woe betide that nation unless it mends its ways. The awakening will be largely brought about by women who have been provided with an infinitely greater capacity for love (I use the word in its widest sense) than men, and that is why I have great hopes from women like Edith Forrester."

"I am obliged to you for your lecture," said Staunton; "but it is not complete. Will you now kindly say what is your panacea for securing happiness?"

"Ask me something easy. You know I have no

such panacea, and am often one of the most miserable beings on earth myself ; but recently I have come to think that a reasonable measure of content can be obtained by those who live simply and moderately, avoid attempting to secure wealth, and who endeavour, as far as in them lies, to improve the general conditions of life for all."

"I am afraid human nature is selfish," said Staunton, "and that it is not of much use trying to improve it."

"Of course it is. The more you elevate the people, the pleasanter the world will be to live in. Don't you think it would be much more agreeable now if all its inhabitants were at the intellectual and moral level of, say, John Burns, the English Progressive, Mr. Charrington, the Whitechapel philanthropist, Washington or Emerson, the great Americans, or, coming to this country, the late Judge Higginbotham, or Sir Francis Ormond, than if they were Alexanders, Cæsars, Bonapartes, Jay Goulds, or the money-hunting wretches who worked up the celebrated—or infamous—land boom in Melbourne, and threw the country back a generation ?"

"When you put it in that way, I believe it would," said Staunton.

"Very well, then. Help in the improvement all you can."

"I will do my best, and already have done something. For instance, I never lose an opportunity of

decrying betting and gambling (a very bad form of money-hunting, I think), in connection with sport, and I even remonstrated with you about that sovereign you won from Jack Forrester the night of Copplestone's dance."

"You did, and I forgave Forrester the bet; firstly, because my conscience was pricked, and secondly, because I knew I should never get it, anyway."

"The latter is a bad reason, coming from a man of your high morality."

"Don't be sarcastic, and go on describing your own good deeds."

"Well, I have not done much for human beings as yet, but I have labored exceedingly to make Mrs. Williams' cow fat——"

"And to keep yourself thin. Your motives are not wholly unselfish in that case, but you have done some good, for the 'kyiow' is certainly the fattest and most contented animal in Stanley—Hallo! there's Miss Copplestone across the street——Here, hold on; you have not finished the article on the new cricket ground yet."

"Blow the cricket ground!" said Staunton, as he disappeared.

"He is in the most rudimentary stage of progressivism, or he would not run off like this and leave me to complete his work," said Ryan, sadly, taking up his pen to add a couple of paragraphs to the article.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT were Miss Forrester's motives in marrying Mr. Townsend it would be profitless to seek to discover. It is sufficient to say that they had nothing to do with the one justifiable motive—love—and as was only to be expected from such a union, it proved an unfortunate one. Prior to her marriage, the lady had not evinced very much more affection for her mother than for her father, but after that event she apparently changed in this respect, and was so often at her parents' house that it would have been reasonable to inquire if she spent any time at all in her own. Townsend's farm was about three miles from Stanley, and Miss Forrester would not have walked such a distance for any consideration, but Mrs. Townsend constantly traversed it, and arriving tired at her mother's house, had to remain there all night, while Townsend, sitting at home after his cheerless and ill-cooked dinner, would often find himself wondering if he were married at all.

He easily satisfied himself on this point, however, by studying the butt of his cheque book, which showed that his expenditure had doubled during the last few months, while his comforts had decreased by one-half, leaving it difficult to discover anything more than "*minus* nothing," as the value of his speculation in the market of matrimony. In his bachelor days he had been a particular chappie, and possessed no end of hats, coats, and boots, placed carefully away in drawers and presses. Now all these things were jumbled into one small wardrobe, where, crushed and neglected beyond recognition, they would scarcely satisfy the tastes of a careless man, let alone one who prided himself on his appearance. His fencing foil and gun were thrust into an out-house, amongst the cobwebs and mould, his single-sticks were used for carpet-beating, and his Indian clubs employed to keep doors open. His pipes, which once garnished the dining-room mantleshef, were swept into a drawer where he never could find them when wanted. The dirty little servant who now controlled the domestic destinies lit the fires with his cigar boxes, leaving the contents to lie loose, and finally, in his bedroom, or indeed the whole house, there was not a drawer or corner he could call his own. Feminine apparel everywhere ; laces, frills, ribbons, dresses, gloves, hats, parasols, and numberless other articles, many of which being provided with hooks, pins, and strings, caught in his clothing, or tripped

him up once or twice a day. He was in fact "crowded out" of the house, and the dirty little servant had, apparently, some trouble in schooling herself to tolerate him at all. He had the farm to himself, however, for his wife never even went into the garden, and after his dismal breakfast of underdone chops, eaten in solitude—for Mrs. Townsend generally took a cup of tea and slice of toast in bed—he sallied forth, and spent the whole day in the fields, where from sheer want of occupation, he now began to pick up some knowledge of farming.

As for the lady, she became more and more active—outside her own house—and everyone she knew, or ever had known, in Stanley, received a visit from her, and at balls, parties, and tea-fights, she was a constant attendant, while Townsend, who at one time used to enjoy such things, gave them a wider and wider berth, as time went on. He seemed to take more to Staunton, however, and sometimes rode over and stayed to dinner, at which he appreciated Miss Williams' cooking, which was "the best Ai have known out of Angland, bai Jove!" As a return for these dinners, he one day asked Staunton to go out with him to the farm, dine, and stay all night; and glad of a chance to obtain a little fresh air, and spend a night in the beloved country, the latter accepted.

Jack Forrester and Miss Davis, who were now engaged, and might get married in five years—perhaps



never—had driven over in the “old man’s” buggy, and Miss Mary was staying with her sister, so that there was such an unusual number to dinner, that the hapless little servant *fell* to the occasion, with something like a thud, and did everything in exactly the way it ought not to be done, which was not to be wondered at, as she had had no previous experience, and was left to get on as best she could, with very little assistance from her mistress. Townsend did what he could to repair the deficiencies, and, painfully unaccustomed as he was to such effort, made a good host. He had bought some excellent Australian claret, and a reisling of fair flavor, which would have been excellent if drunk out of wine glasses, but the fragments of most of the dozen he had purchased prior to his marriage lay on the dust heap, and the few whole ones contained flowers, oil, and other things for which they were not intended, and so the wine had to be drunk out of tumblers. He had bought, when in town in the afternoon, some raisins, walnuts, and figs, and these came in very well indeed for dessert, as the dinner had not been very satisfying. Townsend was very far from comfortable throughout the meal, but his wife sat quite easy and unruffled through it all, and, with her sister and Miss Davis, seemed to be quite satisfied with a slice of bread and butter, and a cup of tea.

After dinner, when the ladies had retired to the

twelve by ten drawing-room, Townsend searched for "cigaws" in odd corners, where they had been cast by the dirty little servant, and as he knelt and rummaged about amongst glasses, preserves, and bottles, he murmured, "Too bad, bai Jove! I'll wig that little devil for throwing my things about like this." When he had put his hand into a dish of jam, and a treacle jar, and smashed a tumbler, he found two or three cigars, and was entering on an equally arduous search for brandy, when Staunton begged him to desist, and assured him that he was very well pleased with the claret, which was excellent—an opinion which Forrester confirmed. A not very interesting half-hour followed, for Townsend could only talk about horses, and Jack Forrester about "the old man," and Staunton was glad to join the ladies in the commodious drawing-room, where they had some music and singing. Miss Davis sang a touching ballad about some love-sick youth—certainly not Mr. Jack Forrester—who "Gaive His Heart to Me," and then, having parted with his most essential organ, naturally expired. Mrs. Townsend favored the company with the information that "Her Heart was Bro-o-ken," in which case someone must have gone to work with a sledge hammer, Staunton thought. Townsend next sang "Thai Voice is Neah Me in Mai Dweams," in a manner that caused Staunton severe suffering, and made him very grateful to Jack Forrester, who afforded a legiti-

mate excuse for laughter by singing an Irish comic song remarkably well.

Staunton found, on looking round, that he had all the fun to himself, for the ladies did not move a muscle of their faces, while Townsend, with his glass in his eye, was staring at the singer in an evidently vain effort to discover wherein the reason or point of the song lay. A desultory attempt at conversation was next made, but proved such a dismal failure that Townsend, in despair, asked Staunton if he could not "wecite something. All newspaper fellows can write poetry, wecite, or do something of that kind," he remarked.

Feeling that anything would be better than sitting in embarrassing silence, Staunton replied, and gave them a political stump speech that elsewhere had proved side-splitting, following this with the most pathetic verses he knew. Both pieces had exactly the same reception from the audience, which was not affected in the least by either.

When the small servant, thrusting a piebald countenance into the room, said, "Supper is witing," Staunton felt devoutly thankful, and noting that Townsend and his wife rarely exchanged a word or glance, he really felt unequal to spending a night under their roof, as he had promised, and begged them to excuse him on the ground of some important work which he "had forgotten to mention."

"I'll drive you back, Staunton," said Jack Forrester.

"Thank you, I'll walk," replied the former, feeling that he would be *de trop* driving home with a couple of lovers in the sentimental darkness.

"Walk—nonsense!" said Forrester, who had the local antipathy to using his own legs, which Staunton afterwards heard expressed by a Melbourne larrikin, who, as he threw himself wearily on the seat of a tram car, exclaimed to his mate, "Gord, my feet is tired. I do 'ate walkin'."

On learning that Miss Mary was to accompany her brother and Miss Davis, Staunton felt that his additional presence could not materially affect the lovers, and accordingly took his seat by his stolid young friend, while Miss Davis accommodated herself beside Mr. Forrester. With a chorus of "Good-nights," and "Good-naights" (the latter being the local variant,) they drove off, leaving the Townsends to the enjoyment of their happy home. "We'll get into town by eleven," said Mr. Forrester, "that is if this blessed old moke does not smash us up on the way. He shies at everything he sees—gates, bushes, white stones, telegraph poles, and gas lamps, and, rather than be beat, he'd shy at the moon, I believe. The 'old man' thinks he's a fine horse, though, because he gave eighteen pounds for him, but he was never worth more than the price of his skin. I said so at the time,

but he wouldn't let me talk, and so I let him go his own way." Overcome, apparently by these reminiscences, Mr. Forrester lapsed into silence, and Miss Davis presently rested her head on his shoulder, while he placed his arm round her waist, and thus they sat for half-an-hour, at the end of which time Staunton made an heroic attempt to enter into conversation with his companion.

"Do you like driving," he asked.

"No," replied Miss Mary.

"Perhaps you prefer riding."

"No."

"Then you are fond of walking, no doubt?"

"Not much."

"I'll pursue this to the bitter end," said Staunton to himself, as he wiped his brow, and continued aloud,

"What is your favorite exercise, then?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps you like passive occupations best."

"What?"

"Passive occupations, reading, the theatre, concerts, watching games, and so on."

"No."

"What do you like, then?"

"I don't know. What a lot of questions you ask."

"Forrester, let me down here, this is my corner," said Staunton, and bidding his companions "Good-night," he walked home, and entering, found Ryan

deep in a book, and enveloped in tobacco smoke.

"Hallo, Staunton ! What brings you back ? I thought you were going to stay all night. And why that gloom on your classic features ? You look as if you had been attending a funeral."

"Well, I have been a reluctant witness of the death of hope. Ryan, you were right about that affair of Townsend's. It is a heavy tragedy."

"I feared so," said Ryan, dropping his light tone ; "and it is one that our obsolete customs will prolong till death steps in to relieve those two."

"Seeing that, I have become a convert to your views," said Staunton. "These unions, without love on both sides, should never take place, and no contract should be irrevocable, or revocable, only under conditions which to many are impossible. Perhaps, though, in the Townsends' case things may get better should they have children ?"

"Not a bit of it," said Ryan, "they will get worse. The children, as they grow up, will take sides, and widen the rift. It is a natural sin for people having no affection for each other to have children."

"Well, those people have given me the blues to-night, and that awful girl, Mary Forrester, made me worse. I don't believe there is any order in the universe, feel certain that the human race is rapidly going to the deuce, and entirely approve of suicide."

"Really. Well, there's brandy at your elbow, soda

in that syphon, and tobacco in that jar. Drink a nobbler, and smoke a pipe, and then you are free to destroy yourself, if you still feel willing. The means to do so are at your hand, for the sideboard creaks under the weight of a new 'cike' which Miss Williams has been experimenting on. Take a slab of that, and earthly matters will trouble you no more."

## CHAPTER XXV.

“NEVER had men a more indefatigable partner than you,” said Ryan to Edith Forrester, as he watched her at work one day. “But though that is good for us, it is bad for you, and I prescribe a rest for the editor who looks ill and worried.”

“The editor is much obliged to you for your consideration,” she replied with a smile, “and I think I shall take a few days’ rest, and go to Brighton or St. Kilda, where the sea air will quickly restore me to health.” A little later she departed, and her partners realised how much she had done when they came to take over her work in addition to their own.

A few days before her expected return, Ryan received a telegram from Melbourne containing the words:—“Eureka. Come,” and in obedience to the summons, he left Stanley on a Saturday afternoon, and on arriving at Melbourne took a tram to Wellington Parade, whence he walked to Grey Street. Knocking at the



door of a comfortable-looking house in this street, he asked for Mr. Laughton, and in a moment was joined by the youthful chemist, who almost wrung his hand off in the warmth of his greeting.

"I am glad you came so quickly, Ryan. Well, as I said in the telegram, I have it, my boy."

"Are you quite sure, or is it another false alarm? Recollect you said you 'had it' before."

"Excuse me, I said I thought so, but admitted there was a doubt. Oh, I am too old a chemist to be cocksure about anything till I have proved it, and this time, though my fingers were itching to wire to you, I held off till I had proved the main thing, and more besides. Come, and I will show you. Stay, though; I must first tell you that I have another partner who takes a fourth share with you, leaving me one half."

"That's all right; though I don't know why you *will* call me a partner. I have done nothing to deserve it."

"You are unjust to yourself. Without you I could not have carried on the work, and you must accept your share, or I shall cut you for life. But come and be introduced to your partner, who, singularly enough, arrived just before you."

So saying, Laughton, who was evidently much excited and elated, led Ryan to his laboratory. A lady was seated at a table in the centre of the room as they entered, and to her he said, "Allow me to introduce ——" but was interrupted by Ryan, who exclaimed,

"Bless me, Edith, are you my partner in yet another venture?"

She laughed merrily, and Laughton, looking from one to the other in surprise, exclaimed, "What! you two know one another already, and are partners in something else? Well, that is delightful."

"I was not aware that you knew Miss Forrester," said Ryan.

"Oh, I have had the pleasure of her acquaintance for years. Met her in London before I came out."

"Matthew has been very good to me," said Edith, "and insists on making me rich with this fourth share."

"Ah! then I suppose I shall be made rich too?"

"You shall see," said the chemist. "Sit down, please." He now took from a cupboard a glass dish, in which was a white substance, in small lumps, and placing the dish on the table, said, "In your opinion, what is that, Mr. Ryan? It is not poison, so you can taste it."

Ryan took up one of the lumps, examined it closely, tasted it, and then said, "I think it is starch."

"What do you say, Edith?"

"It is starch," she said.

"Very good. And now, what would you call that?" producing another dish, in which was a soft, white substance.

"Flour," they replied together, after a brief examination.

"All right, but be careful you don't make any mistake. And now, will you allow me to give you a slice of bread and butter?" and taking a large, crusty loaf from the cupboard, he cut off some thin slices, and buttering these, offered them to his visitors. "Is it good?" he demanded, beaming on them through his spectacles, as they ate.

"Excellent!" mumbled Ryan, with his mouth full.

"Delicious!" said Edith. "Give me another slice, please, Mat?"

"Ah! I thought you would appreciate it. Now," he went on, "I will ask you to taste this cake and these scones." Both were tried and pronounced most excellent. "And where do you suppose the flour was obtained from which all these things were made?"

"From Barton's mills," said Ryan, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Nothing of the kind," said the delighted Laughton, with a thump on his bench that caused the retorts and pipettes to rattle, "but made synthetically by me in this very laboratory. Yes, my friends, after seven years of continuous labor, I have solved the problem, and the synthesis of starch and gluten is an accomplished fact."

His enthusiasm was infectious, and they both wrung his hands heartily, in the warmth of their congratulations, while he looked from one to the other with eyes suffused with tears of joy and pride.

The first congratulations over, he said, "I have solved the problem absolutely, and for ever, and am prepared, with proper appliances, to manufacture fifty thousand tons of pure flour with less trouble than it has cost me to make the fifty pounds or so in yonder bin. It has been a weary task, though, and but for your encouragement and help, Ryan, and the interest you took in my work from the day I first explained it to you, I believe I should have given up in despair. Thank goodness I did not, though, and now am in a position to return your kindness. The discovery is a most important one, and I prophesy that, in five years from now, there will not be an acre of wheat grown in the world."

"I think you are prophesying too much," said Ryan. "You can hardly do without wheat just yet, for you must consider the husk in connection with cattle feeding, and also brown bread."

"The husk is only cellulose, which I could make if required."

"Will your starch do for laundry purposes?" asked Edith.

"Ah, I forgot to show you," and, going to the cupboard again, he produced a shirt most beautifully "done up," with front and cuffs of a wonderful sheen. "That shirt was starched and ironed in my presence by my landlady, the starch used being the same as that on the table."

"You certainly have made a great discovery," said Ryan, thoughtfully; "and you will ruin the millers."

"Yes, and the wheat farmers of Australia, America and Russia; the rice growing Indian Ryot, the Japanese, Chinese, and——"

"Hold, enough," said Ryan, interrupting the excited chemist. "You will play havoc with the world if you take away the livelihood of all these people. You will have to go slow."

"I can't if I wanted to. The matter once out will spread like wild fire, and I am afraid I have not completed my catalogue of ruined ones yet, for when you interrupted me I was about to say that the barley growers and maltsters must go too, for beer, whisky, and gin will undoubtedly be largely made from my starch."

"But not entirely?"

"A little malt will have to be used for conversion purposes, but that is all. I could show you in twenty minutes that, in the presence of diastase, this starch is converted into sugar even more rapidly than the natural product—and, talking of sugar, having starch, I can, of course, produce grape sugar with the utmost ease, by boiling with a little sulphuric or other acid. I have done this, fermented a solution of the product with yeast, and then obtained alcohol by the distillation—whisky, practically. While on this subject I may as well tell you that, having prepared starch

synthetically, it is no great step to combine carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen in higher quantities, and obtain cane sugar, which I have already almost accomplished. So you see, I will ruin the sugar cane growers and refiners also."

"Heaven help Queensland," said Ryan.

"Aye ; and Mauritius, Fiji, and France, with her beet sugar industry."

"Those brains of yours will do awful mischief, Matt," said Edith, rather sadly.

"They will," assented Ryan, "and we should perhaps be serving humanity by blowing them out."

"You would be injuring humanity, for, even if I do nothing more, this discovery will set hundreds, aye thousands, working on the synthetical preparation of foods, and, in a few years, most of our articles of diet will be made directly from their elements."

"If that be so, the world will be revolutionised with a vengeance, for the greater number of its inhabitants are engaged in the growing and preparation of foods, their transport, and so on."

"The preparation and transport will go on just the same as ever, though the conditions under which they will be carried out will be different. The breeding and killing of animals for food will, however, be completely stopped."

"That, at all events, will be a great step gained," said Edith.

“Undoubtedly ; and it was the hope that I might be able to do something in the way of checking the slaying of animals, which I have always considered cruel and brutalising, that started me on my synthetical experiments. I hope yet to be able to discover a method of preparing food as nutritious as meat on the lines followed by an Austrian chemist, to whose work I am largely indebted for my success in preparing that highly complex substance, gluten.”

“And, now, as to the cost of manufacturing ?”

“It will be very small when all the necessary arrangements are completed. I make the starch direct from its elements, obtaining the hydrogen and oxygen from water, and the carbon from carbonic acid gas. The carbon has given me almost all my trouble, and I should have been ready years ago only for the difficulty it has occasioned. I obtained it from coal, from charcoal, and ordinary wood, by a special process, and the wretched thing always comes out black, and remained black even after combination, giving me starch like black lead, and flour that looked more like gunpowder than anything else. The gluten I obtain from the same sources, and it gave me awful trouble. But I have got it right now, and, even with my present not very perfect plan of working, I calculate that I can produce as much flour as would be yielded by a bushel of wheat for one shilling.”

“Whew,” whistled Ryan. “No earthly chance

for the poor farmer.”

“Not the slightest. You may consider him ruined, as I said.”

“Are you certain about the nutritive quality of this product?”

“I have been using bread made from that flour I showed you for some weeks, and never felt better, and I have a couple of analysts’ opinions that it is a perfectly pure flour.”

“You seem to have proved everything, so far as I can see,” said Ryan. “And, now, how do you propose to make the discovery public.”

“I left that to you to decide, as you are much more of a business man, and of the world, than I; but my idea is that we should make the discovery public in England first. It is of such importance that it merits serious consideration, even on the part of the Imperial Government.”

“Undoubtedly; but, if you were mercenary, you could make a heap of money by selling it to a syndicate of millers, who would buy it to suppress it.”

“I should not consent to that, for I believe that, though it will injure some, it will ultimately benefit the majority, and will open the door to other discoveries, which will cheapen food, and lessen disease.

“Why the latter?”

“Because there is scarcely a single natural food that is free from the presence of diseased bacilli, but the



artificial foods could be prepared in pure condition."

Ryan sat silent for a while, and apparently forgot the practical questions in contemplation of the enormous consequences of Laughton's discovery, for he next said, "If this thing of yours is followed up, there will be no necessity for tilling the ground and keeping animals, and there will be only one race left on the face of the earth—man.

"You are looking pretty far ahead ; but even supposing that all animals are killed off, and man keeps the earth to himself, he is only fulfilling his destiny. Nature always meant to give the battle to him. But let us have some tea now, and afterwards we can discuss measures for making the discovery public."

For hours they sat discussing this momentous question, and finally Ryan said to Laughton, "I am willing to go to England with you, and arrange about the manner in which your great discovery is to be made public—that is, if my partners in the newspaper are willing."

Edith looked troubled. "Do you think it is necessary for you to go?" she asked.

"I think so. This matter is of infinitely more importance than the paper, and I think Matthew could not manage by himself."

"I am certain I could not," said the chemist, "for, out of my laboratory, I am useless."

"I suppose you must go, then," said Edith. "But,

regarding the subject from a purely selfish point of view, it seems a pity, for we were getting on so nicely, and doing good work, I think."

"*You* were, at any rate, for your soul was in it. But you can continue with Staunton, with whom we will discuss everything when we return to Stanley. And now, Matthew, let me ask you do you want to make a huge pile out of the discovery?"

"Not I. I worked at it firstly because I thought it would be a good thing for everyone if the synthetical preparation of foods was accomplished; secondly, to give Edith and you something; and thirdly, to secure enough money to enable me to continue my researches."

"Now, as to you, Edith?"

"You know I don't want anything," she said, "and am quite contented as I am."

"And I want very little indeed, and, therefore, as we are all of one mind, I propose that we do not sell the discovery at all, but make it a virtual present to the world."

After further discussion, it was agreed that affairs should be conducted on the lines suggested by Ryan, and that the latter, after disposing of his interest in the paper, should proceed with Laughton to England. This decision arrived at, silence fell upon the party, and, despite the greatness of the work that lay before them, all seemed somewhat depressed.

Laughton's great triumph lay in the discovery, and the moment that was accomplished and announced to his friends, the inevitable reaction set in, and he looked forward to even a temporary break in his laboratory work with much misgiving. He was unhappy when away from his bench, and in a climate like that of Melbourne, where indoor work is preferable for many months of the year, and sedentary occupations can be pursued at all seasons with comfort, such work as that of the chemist is pleasant indeed.

Edith and Ryan also had become attached to their occupation, and the prospect of breaking up "the firm," too—probably for ever—was not a pleasing one for them to contemplate.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

HERMAN, the unhappy, on whom the sun had only shone at brief intervals during his whole life, was, after a short sojourn in comparative light, rapidly entering on a new period of gloom. Signs were not wanting that "The Howleries" would, ere long, have another inhabitant, and resound with a new yell; his racing speculations, which were at first fortunate, had commenced to go against him, and finally Munks, who had been extraordinarily apathetic for months, resumed his old bullying habits.

The explanation of this last trouble was to be found in the fact that Munks was constitutionally incapable of refraining from bullying someone for any length of time, no matter what the consequences might be. He had come back to the office trembling, after his last encounter with Ryan, and retailed the circumstances to Whitegate, who heard him without any exhibition of emotion, and then said, "That may be bluff; but, on

the other hand, it may not, and our best plan is to sit back for a time. You hear, Munks ; do nothing except the ordinary business with Thomson for six months at least." So instructed, Munks "sat back ;" but the allotted time having passed without change, he gradually plucked up his spirits, and became his old agreeable self again. Herman came in for the full benefit of the change, and Munks, who had spent secret hours of the night over the books, knew that he had the unhappy accountant at his mercy, and could crush him at any time. This was sweet solace to his mind, and he derived much satisfaction from an amiable practice of dropping hints, which he saw made Herman tremble. "I 'eard they gev six years to that fellow that embezzled from Caper & Bounce, in Melbourne," he would remark to Joyce, with his eye on the accountant ; or, when adding up a column, he would exclaim, "Blest if I can make these figures come right. They're as troublesome as if someone had been cooking 'em." Pleasantry of this kind went on day after day, and Herman, always pale, became ghastly, while his milky puffiness changed slowly to a haggard leanness. His was a soul in hell, as the cruel tormentor tortured him, with the full intention of ultimately making a decisive spring, plainly exhibited in his looks.

Herman felt the toils closing round him, and would have taken flight, even with the absolute certainty of capture, but for the fact that he had one chance yet—

the Melbourne Cup. That fatal race ! To how many hundreds has it been the "last chance," and to how very many has it been, literally, the last chance in life !

Herman had begged and borrowed and—obtained—every pound he could, and placed all on a horse he was credibly informed "could not lose." He stood to win £2,000, and then he would square those awkward matters he knew of, pay all debts, give up his billet, defy Munks (perhaps strike him), and then leave Stanley for ever, and go to Melbourne, where he would buy a nice little business, in which he would be his own master, and earn a good living for his family—But, for pity sake, let us recount no more of his high hopes. They were blasted, of course, for heavy rain set in on the morning of the race, and his horse—his "moral"—which might have won on a dry course, came in seventh, or thereabouts, on a wet one.

When Herman staggered out of the club room, where the telegrams were posted, he did not know that it was raining, though it was pouring "heavens hard." His blood was in a fever, his mind a blank, save for a dull sense of fear, that became even greater as he wandered aimlessly about. He dared not go home, so went out of the town, and traversed paddocks and bye-roads till long after nightfall, when a thought of Staunton occurred to him. He had saved him before, might he not do so again ? With a faint ray of hope dawning in his mind, he turned towards the

town, and, on arrival at Mrs. Williams', found Staunton sitting over his coffee and cigar.

"Good heavens, Herman!" he exclaimed, as the splashed and haggard figure of the accountant appeared. "What is the matter? You look awful."

"Oh, Mr. Staunton——" But he got no further, and, sinking exhausted into a seat, burst into tears.

Staunton was alarmed. "Here, drink this," he said, pushing over a cup of coffee, which Herman, with an effort, drank, and then, becoming calmer, he unfolded his dismal tale, which the listener heard in blank dismay. "Five hundred pounds!" he said, when the unhappy man had concluded. "You have taken five hundred pounds! This is serious, indeed."

"It means ruin, Mr. Staunton. I shall be imprisoned for four or five years, and my wife and children will starve—yes, starve. Oh! that devil, Munks; may he be tortured as he tortured me!" And he started up in a frenzy and impotent rage.

"Sit down; sit down," said Staunton, endeavoring to calm him, "and let us try to think of some way out of the trouble. You took the money hoping to win enough to enable you to get square, and leave Sellbridges', you say?"

"Yes, Mr. Staunton. So help me God, I meant to pay it all back, and I should never have taken a penny only for the way that wretch tortured me, and drove me to take the money in the hope of getting away from him."

“ Would it be of any use to speak to Whitegate ? ”

“ Not a bit ; not a bit. He is in with Munks, and is just as bad, in a different way.”

Staunton sat in thought for some time—Herman eyeing him anxiously—and then said, “ My partners are both in Melbourne, which is unfortunate, for, if they were here, I believe we could have advanced you the money to square this business, and then taken you on here till you worked out the debt. We want an accountant, as our business has grown so much that I cannot manage the books single handed. In the absence of my partners I cannot raise sufficient myself ; but they will be back in a few days, and meanwhile I think I can get the money from another source.”

“ Soon ? ” queried Herman, relieved, but anxious.

“ To-morrow. But why do you ask ? ”

“ Because Munks knows. He has known for months past, and every day I have been expecting him to come down on me.”

“ That is awkward,” said Staunton, “ and I shall have to act at once. I will see my friend early to-morrow, and then go past Sellbridges’ to the Royal Hotel, where I will wait for you. When you see me go by you can get out on some excuse or another. You need not thank me ; it is a duty to help one’s fellow creatures. But you appear faint ; let me get you something to eat.”

“ I should be grateful. I have had nothing since



morning." Refreshed by a good meal, and greatly cheered in mind, Herman departed for his home, unconscious that, as he emerged from the gate, he was recognised by a man lurking on the opposite side of the way."

"Herman, by gum!" said Munks to himself. "So he is selling us, too, but we can come down sharp on *him*, at any rate. Whitegate won't have any objections to prosecuting him when he hears of this. I will go and tell him at once."

Next morning Staunton surprised the Copplestons by calling while they were at breakfast, and so embarrassed Miss Copplestone that she placed salt in her father's tea instead of sugar, and white fish sauce in her mother's instead of milk. The visitor hurriedly explained his errand, and the old gentleman, who had "heart enough for two," swallowed his last mouthful of bread, emptied his cup, merely remarking "Singular flavor the tea has this morning," and then went forth with Staunton. The latter hastily unfolded his plan as they proceeded, and, the other agreeing with it, they made for the place of meeting; but, as they neared Sellbridges', they saw, to their dismay, a cab stop at the door, and two policemen jump from the vehicle and enter the office. Pressing on with all speed they entered a few moments later than the officers, and just as one of the latter said, "Robert Herman, I arrest you on a charge of embezzling the sum of forty-nine

pounds ten shillings, the funds of your employers, Messrs. Sellbridge and Co. There are other charges, and I warn you that anything you will say will be used against you."

Staunton was about to rush in and interfere, when Copplestone whispered, "We are too late—the law must take its course now. All we can do is to attend the Police Court and secure his release on bail."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN Edith and Ryan returned to Stanley, they found Staunton in great excitement about Herman's case, in which he was intensely interested. At the Police Court the evidence of Munks, Whitegate, and an accountant who had been called in to examine the books, clearly proved Herman's guilt, and he was committed for trial at the next Sessions. Bail was, however, allowed, and Mr. Copplestone and Staunton becoming bondsmen, the prisoner was released, and returned to "The Howleries," where the news of the catastrophe was received by Mrs. Herman with a stolidity born of many births.

Staunton related all that had passed to his partners, and said, "We ought to make a great effort to save Herman from those wretches. His dishonesty was entirely the result of persecution ; but, nevertheless, if we do not step in, he is certain to be sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, for legally, he is undoubtedly guilty."

"We will do our best to save him," said Ryan, "even if I have to defer my departure on his account."

"Your departure ; where are you going ?"

"Oh, I forgot you do not know." And then Ryan acquainted his partner of the events that had taken place in Melbourne, and told him of the projected trip to England.

Staunton received the news even more unwillingly than Edith, and did not at all approve of the dismemberment of "the firm," and was much averse to severing his connection with *The Moon*.

"Well, don't sever it," said Ryan. "Keep on with Edith."

"I should not feel safe if you were out of it. It takes a man with your Machiavellian head to run a thing like this without capital."

"Well, as I must go, I suppose you will sell out ?"

"Yes, much against my will."

"And what next ?"

"I suppose I shall carry out my pet idea of taking up a piece of land and working it. I believe I could make a living by dairying, judging by my success with Mrs. Williams' 'kyiow,' but I should prefer to go on here. I have come to like the work better of late, and I think the newspaper business about as good, useful, and honest——"

"Oh, come."

"I said *honest*."

"Why, my most consistent Briton, you said, on the day of Copplestone's picnic, that newspaper men wrote lies while others spoke them."

"I was full of the land idea then, and have since come to the conclusion that, after all, we don't write so many lies."

"How 'use begets a second nature in a man,' and much mendacity makes him callous. The commercial and social side of our paper is one tissue of lies from beginning to end."

"Who is exaggerating now?"

"I am not, and I will undertake to prove it to you. What are those proofs on the desk there?"

"Those are 'locals' for to-day's issue."

"Who wrote them?"

"Wilkes and I."

"Well, I will transcribe them with a strict regard for truth, and you will see the difference."

In accordance with this declaration, Ryan, after some conversation with Wilkes, transcribed the articles, and that evening he said to Staunton, "Now read your mendacious paragraphs as actually published, and after each one, I will read you my veracious transcription."

Staunton accordingly read from the paper:—

"We are always glad to encourage our own industries by every means in our power, and it is with great pleasure that we note the continuous success of Pied-Bouchon's glass eye, cork leg, and surgical appliances factory, at South Stanley. During the twelve months that have elapsed since the establishment of

these works, eight cork legs, fourteen wooden ditto, thirty-three glass eyes of all colors, three crutches, several knee-caps, and other minor articles, have been turned out in a style that could not be excelled by the oldest European establishment, while a large amount of repair work has been done; so much, in fact, that the enterprising proprietor, Mons. Alphonse Pied-Bouchon, has found it necessary to enlarge the accommodation of his factory by the addition to it of a substantial galvanised iron lean-to, 13 feet long by 8 wide, and also to increase his staff, which now consists of a man and two boys. The success of these works, which reflect great credit on Stanley, is, of course, entirely due to the protective duty of 55 per cent. *ad valorem*, which (mainly through the energetic member for West Stanley, supported by figures and statistics supplied by M. Pied-Bouchon) was imposed by the Legislature on all cork legs, glass eyes, and surgical appliances coming into the colony. Guided by practical hints from M. Pied-Bouchon, the Customs authorities have rigidly enforced the law during the last twelve months, and it is not too much to say that the importation of the above goods has been entirely stopped, and even persons coming into the colony wearing artificial limbs or optics have been obliged to pay 55 per cent. on the assessed value of these. The collection of the duty has not always been easy or pleasant, and several cases have been reported of assaults on Customs officers by new arrivals of the male sex, who were subjected to painful compression of the eye socket, under the mistaken idea that they possessed a glass optic, and limping ladies, who became extremely indignant—not to say ferocious—under the stern official command, ‘Show your leg.’ Despite these drawbacks, however, the officers have rigidly carried out their duty, and, as a consequence, we have these flourishing works at South Stanley, to which we wish continuous success.”

“A very fine example of journalistic lying,” said

Ryan, when Staunton had concluded. "Now, listen to the truth" :—

"We are always glad to encourage local industry, where such has nothing exotic or forced about it, but for a bolstered-up concern like Pied-Bouchon's surgical appliances manufactory at South Stanley, we have nothing but the heartiest condemnation. The few cork legs and glass eyes turned out—very indifferently—in the wretched little factory of two rooms and a lean-to, were dearly purchased at a cost to the colony of 55 per cent. ad valorem on all the surgical appliances imported from Europe. The action of the legislators who (on the prompting of an irresponsible Frenchman, who is not, and never will be, Australian in sentiment, and does not care a farthing what losses and injustices are inflicted on the Victorian community, so long as he himself scores), secured the imposition of the above iniquitous duty, merits the execration of every honest man in the country. The collection of the duty has brought upon our officials deserved contempt, and, in the interests of the colony at large, we hope that it will be quickly repealed, and M. Pied-Bouchon's utterly uncalled-for 'industry' allowed to expire."

"That is how the local ought to have been written," said Ryan ; "but Wilkes got a three pound 'ad.' from that consummate old scoundrel, Pied-Bouchon, who is undoubtedly a New Caledonian escapee, and Wilkes, and you, and I, three sufficiently honest men, lend ourselves to perjury for that old rascal's dirty three pounds. Oh ! It's a fine honest business. But read your next."

Staunton read as follows :—

"Sergeant Blatherby, who recently retired from the police

force after twenty-five years of continuous service, was, at the Fox and Grapes Hotel, on Saturday night, the recipient of a gratifying tribute of respect and goodwill from a number of leading hotelkeepers and other ratepayers of South Stanley, in which district he has been stationed for the past nine years. In the presence of a large number of prominent citizens, he was presented with a beautifully-mounted set of spirit decanters, the solid silver stand of which was tastefully inscribed with the recipient's name and those of the leading donors. Councillor Buncombe, of the Boodlers' Arms, made the presentation, and accompanied the gift with a speech that excited loud applause, and greatly affected the Sergeant, who had some difficulty in sufficiently overcoming his emotion, when returning thanks, but succeeded in doing so, and made a most eloquent speech. He had always done his duty, he was proud to say, but, at the same time, had endeavoured to be just and impartial to all. His relations with 'the trade,' he was proud to say, had always been of the most pleasant kind. (Loud applause). He had always had the greatest respect for hotelkeepers, and it was his intention to take a 'house' himself; in fact, he might mention, as he was amongst friends, that he had secured a lease of the 'Coppers' Rest,' where he hoped his friends would often come to see him. (Cries of 'We will, old man,' and cheers). The proceedings then became informal, refreshments were ordered in, and the rest of the evening was given over to hilarity."

"Very excellent; very untrue," said Ryan, and then proceeded to read *his* local:—

"Sergeant Blatherby, who for twenty-five years has consistently played into the hands of the hotelkeepers by winking at their evasions of the licensing laws, was, by his grateful friends inhabiting South Stanley, rewarded for his services by a presentation, which took the appropriate form of a case of decanters. The humbug took place at the Fox and Grapes on Saturday night, and 'the trade' mustered in great force.



Councillor Buncombe, of the Boodlers' Arms, where old Blatherby has had, perhaps, five thousand free drinks, was the spokesman, and he talked the customary rot, and told the customary lies. The Sergeant, who was three parts gone, at this stage wept maudlin tears, but then rallied and returned thanks in a speech which commenced with the falsehood that he had always done his duty, but returned to the realms of truth when he said that he had always been a good friend to the hotelkeepers. He announced his intention of entering the business himself, which, of course, he was bound to do, as his sympathies were always with it, and, like the Bradys, he 'never was fond of hard work.' The proceedings then became riotously noisy; the rest of the evening was given over to drinking and singing, and the Sergeant became as drunk as a boiled owl, and had to be carried home.—"

"though the last fact is not referred to in the local, and I only learned it incidentally from Wilkes," continued Ryan. "Perjury again, you see, bought this time for £2 10s, for the ex-Sergeant's advertisement of the 'Coppers' Rest.' Go on with your falsehoods."

Staunton read :—

"We have to acknowledge receipt of samples of 'Purity' brand jams manufactured by the 'Purity' Jam Preserving Company of Stanley, whose factory was recently described in our columns. These jams, as their name denotes, are manufactured from the purest fruit and sugar, and their quality is most excellent. We have rarely tasted anything more delicious than the 'Purity' gooseberry, which is equal to the best home-made, while the strawberry jam is not a whit inferior. The 'Purity' Fruit Preserving Company is to be congratulated on furnishing the public with such excellent jams at a low price."

“ Now, that local should read truthfully like this,” said Ryan :—

“ Samples of mendaciously-named ‘ Purity ’ jams have been forwarded to our office, though we have never done the manufacturers any harm. Judging from the two or three tins that we opened and tasted, we should say that these jams are made from cheap sugars and damaged fruit. Their quality is execrable. We have rarely tasted anything so *unlike* gooseberry jam as the compound foisted off on the public under that name by the ‘ Purity ’ people, while the strawberry jam is not an atom better, and had only about three strawberries to each tin, the balance evidently being ‘ stock pulp ’ composed of a mixture of odd fruits, with tomatoes, vegetable marrows, and perhaps a few turnips. The manufacturers ought to be proceeded against criminally for putting on the market such miserable rubbish under false and misleading titles.”

“ Oh, that is too rough altogether,” said Staunton.

“ Not a bit of it. Did you taste the jams? ”

“ No.”

“ And yet you wrote all that rubbish praising them up? You are a moral young man.”

“ Well, Wilkes gave me the notes.”

“ I know, and *he* took deuced good care not to taste the jams either, till I obliged him to do so, when I was trying them myself, before writing these notes, and then he said they were ‘ damnable.’ And yet, for a paltry five pound advertisement, he furnished you with the material for all those falsehoods you have strung together.”

“ But you are just as bad yourself, my moral partner.

Some months ago you wrote a column leader, praising up Tapes, the draper, who was standing for 'Tatoora, in the Municipal Council, and yet privately you told me that it would be a good thing for the community if somebody waddied Tapes on the head, 'for it would be a waste of good rope to hang him,' or something of the kind."

"I perfectly remember, and I am not holding myself up as an example to Wilkes or you. I am merely trying to show you that you are quite wrong in saying that journalism is honest—such journalism as ours, at all events. In the case of Tapes, we were short of cash, and he bought us body, soul, and brains, for a thirty pound advertisement, paid cash down. I may incidentally mention, though, that it needed thirty pounds to suborn me, whereas you fell for two pounds ten. I am, therefore, twenty-seven pounds ten more moral than you. Read your next lie."

Staunton, complying, read :—

"The Directors of the Stanley Deep Lead Company, at their last meeting, decided that it was advisable to make a further call of one shilling per share, in order to drive another five feet to the reef, which had been traced without a possibility of error. Some of the Melbourne shareholders have, we understand, taken exception to this call, and there has been some talk of calling a meeting of shareholders to consider the affairs of the company. This is very unwise, for to even delay work now, when the reef is almost within sight, would be madness. The exercise of a little patience will see the shareholders rewarded by very handsome dividends."

“Very nice—and cheap—for an inch advertisement at four pounds. Now, here is the truth”—

“The coterie of sharpers who call themselves ‘Directors’ of the Stanley Deep Lead Co., have had the impudence to make a further call of one shilling per share on the unfortunate shareholders, in order to, as they, the sharpers aforesaid, untruthfully assert, ‘drive another five feet to the reef, which had been traced without the possibility of error.’ They do not, as a matter of fact, intend to drive another inch, voluntarily—though some of them may yet take an involuntary drive in Black Maria—but if they drove five miles they would never find the reef, for there is no reef. A few shareholders in Melbourne have at last taken alarm, which they should have done a year or more ago, and talk of calling a general meeting of the company. The sooner they do so, and wind it up, the better, for no matter how much gold they put into the mine, they will never get any out, the concern being run only to provide fees and salaries for the directors and their friends.”

“That is about the real state of the case, is it not?”

“I believe so,” said Staunton. “I always knew that Deep Lead thing was a swindle.”

“Everyone in Stanley knows that, and yet we allow our columns to be used for cracking it up—we *honest* journalists.”

“You have made out a strong case,” said Staunton, “and I admit that journalism of our kind is not altogether honest. It is, however, no worse than other things. Look at the lies people tell about the articles they are selling.”

“Oh, yes, it is painfully true that scarcely an article is bought or sold without half-a-dozen lies being told

over the transaction. Everything is 'good,' if not of superlative, quality, in business, and there are no bad articles. 'Fair quality' is the trader's description of something downright bad. But to leave this subject now, you will then not go on here?"

"No, unless Edith particularly wants to."

"She told me she does not. I am very sorry for this break-up of our happy partnership, but this chemical discovery is of extreme importance. As you have decided not to continue, I think the best thing would be to sell the business right out. Our agents in Melbourne will, very likely, know of a suitable person to buy, so I will write them to-morrow, and thus take the first step towards dissolving our attached and happy firm. I may say that my 'Machiavellian head,' as you unkindly call it, is no support to me at all on this occasion, and I feel the pain of parting as if I were a boy of twelve. I have a great regard for you, my worthy Anglo-Saxon journalist and 'kyiow' fattener, and as for Edith, I should be afraid to say how much I like her. I am horribly despondent, my hopes are down to zero, and the whole universe seems to have assumed a blue tint."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

ONE of the features of management in Sellbridge's was the manner in which information on all financial or business movements was obtained, and though Ryan had been very successful in baffling the spies on former occasions, he yet failed to keep the approaching sale of the paper from the knowledge of Whitegate and Munks, who became aware of it when negotiations had almost been concluded. They were pleased, and relieved, to learn of the projected departure of their most dangerous adversary, foreseeing that they would now be able to carry on their own special projects without check. Holding this belief, they became bolder, determined to prosecute Herman with the utmost vigor, and also decided to get rid of Joyce, who, as one of Harry Sellbridge's nominees, they wished out of the way. No excuse, however, presented itself for the discharge of the young man, who, though by no means bright, was a conscientious worker, and performed the simple duties allotted to him faithfully and well.

A bad excuse is better than none at all, however, and chance at length gave such to Messrs. Whitegate and Munks. The latter happened to be at the railway station one night, when a train was leaving for Melbourne, and, himself unnoticed amongst the crowd, he caught sight of Joyce, who, with a female companion, was just entering a first-class carriage. The lady wore a veil, and her features could not be distinguished, but that she was very richly dressed was apparent. Now a richly-dressed woman, accompanying a clerk who had only two pounds a week, could convey but one meaning to a mind like that of Munks', and he, therefore, watched the couple closely, drawing back into the shadow to escape observation. They took their seats in the carriage, which they had to themselves, and talked earnestly for some time, and then, when the last bell rang, the lady lifted her veil and kissed Joyce several times, while he strained her to his breast. The guard's whistle sounded, the locomotive shrieked, and Joyce had barely time to spring out and close the door, when the train moved off, and Munks distinctly heard the lady's last words spoken from the window, "Good-night, dear one." This incident he "made a note of," and the next morning reported to Whitegate, who determined to act on it, in default of a better excuse.

Accordingly, when Joyce came in at his customary hour, the manager said in his clear, even tones, "Take a seat please, Mr. Joyce. I wish to say a word to you.

You know how anxious I have been to further your prospects in every way, firstly, because you came with an introduction from Mr. Sellbridge, whose word is law with me ; secondly, because I took a liking to you from the day you came here. Now you know, or may have heard, that I am scrupulously particular concerning the conduct of every employee of this great firm, for my long experience has taught me that a man whose life out of office hours is not perfectly correct, is not to be trusted *in* office hours. Having, as I said, a regard for you, it was then with great regret that I heard of your being seen at the station last night under circumstances that I cannot regard as unequivocal." Joyce started, and the manager went on, "You are an unmarried man, and you have no relatives in the colonies, you told me yourself. The person you were with was very richly dressed, and was evidently on terms of the closest intimacy with you. What inference can I draw ?"

"Who watched me ?" asked Joyce.

"That I do not feel at liberty to say. You were seen, that is sufficient. Are you engaged to be married to the lady ?"

"No."

"What explanation have you to offer, then ?"

"None," said Joyce, after a moment's silence, during which Whitegate regarded him steadily.

"Then it was as I suspect ?"

"No ; but I do not feel that I am called upon to



account to any man for my private life. This is a free country."

"I don't believe in that kind of freedom, and I well know that entanglements, such as you are evidently in, lead to extravagance, and living beyond income; and what frequently follows is too common to need repetition."

"You hint that I should become dishonest?"

"I do not say so, but I have to remember my responsible position, and duty to my employer, and avoid all risk; and therefore, Mr. Joyce, I must cancel your appointment. You can leave at once, and seek for other employment, though salary will be paid you till the end of the month."

"You are dismissing me on a most flimsy pretext."

"There is no desire to find a pretext. You are discovered under circumstances which I consider require explanation. I have asked you to explain—you decline; and as I consider the circumstances quite doubtful enough to justify me in terminating your engagement, I do it. There is no more to be said. Good morning!"

Joyce said nothing more, but walked quietly out, took up his hat and coat, and left the office for good and all. He went first to *The Moon* office, and informed Staunton and Ryan of what had occurred to him that day.

"So you are sent the way of many others," said the latter. "Well, I warned you that such would be the

case ; and now, in order to satisfy you that what I said about the difficulty of obtaining employment here, when dismissed from Sellbridge's, is correct, just call on the gentlemen whose names I will give you, and ask them if they can find an opening for you."

The first name on the list was that of Mr. Forrester, on whom Joyce at once proceeded to call. Entering the well-furnished parlor of the Central Bank, he found the manager, very calm and imposing, seated at his desk, and evidently very busy.

"Good-day, sir," he said. " Oh, it is Mr. Joyce, of Sellbridge's. What can I do for you ? "

" Well, Mr. Forrester, the fact is I have left Sellbridge's, and I called to ask if you knew of any opening that might suit me. I have good references, and——"

" Left Sellbridge's ? " interrupted the manager. " Why did you do that ? "

" I had no choice. I was sent away. "

Mr. Forrester looked very serious. " Sent away ! " he repeated ; " for what cause ? "

" For no fault in connection with business, but because of a private occurrence of which Mr. Whitegate did not approve. "

" I know Mr. Whitegate very intimately—very intimately indeed—and I have the greatest respect for his judgment and his principles. He is a most upright man, and would not, I feel sure, dismiss anyone without good reason for doing so. "

“In this case he did, however.”

“Perhaps so, looking at it from your point of view ; but anyway, right or wrong, I cannot assist you just now, for I do not know of a suitable opening. In fact I doubt if you will find such in Stanley, which is a small place with little doing in it. In Melbourne, now, you would have a far better chance, and if I were you I should go there at once.”

Joyce next went to Thomson, of the Land Mortgage Co., and was bluntly told by that gentleman that he would not “think of engaging a man who had been sacked from Sellbridge’s.”

His reception by others was somewhat similar, and returning despondent to Staunton and Ryan, he had to ask if they could not give him employment.

“Well, I believe we can take you on temporarily,” said Ryan. “Of course we are leaving here ourselves shortly, as you know. You have always been complaining, Staunton, that the bookkeeping, coupled with your efforts in disseminating the *truth*, was too much for you. Could not Joyce assist yet ?”

“Certainly,” said Staunton. “I meant the place for that poor wretch, Herman ; but of course nothing can be done now till after his trial, which may go against him.”

“Then you can consider yourself engaged, Joyce, and under Mr. Staunton, you will have an excellent opportunity of acquiring the mysterious knowledge of

bookkeeping. He never makes a blot, balances all his columns correctly, prepares handsome balance-sheets, which prove us sometimes to be making thousands a year, and at other times to be hopelessly insolvent, and to which I therefore attach no importance whatever, but without which he says we could not possibly carry on."

"Aye, and under Mr. Ryan you will learn what I may term 'Irish finance,' that is a petty cash box full of I.O.U'S., entries of cash taken on the cuffs of his shirt, debit and credit columns that flatly contradict one another, and a desultory warfare carried on with the bank about the amount to your credit, which, after pitched battles at times, always ends in one way—the victory of the bank."

Joyce laughed and said, "Between both methods I ought to become skilled, and I am a fortunate man to have such an opportunity, and to step into employment so easily," at which they all three laughed.

A few days later Munks said to Whitegate, "That fellow Joyce has joined them 'ere blessed *Moon* chaps, and is workin' in their office."

"I thought they had sold out," said Whitegate.

"They have not gone yet, any way, and he's there. I don't like that lot being together, and wish they were jolly well out of here."

"They soon will be, but meanwhile——What is it, Jones?"

"Some gentlemen to see you, Mr. Whitegate," an-

swered a clerk, who had entered while they were speaking.

"Show them in. Don't go, Munks, this deputation has an interest for you. I saw it coming up the road from the window."

Mr. Copplestone, Staunton, Joyce, and Herman were now shown in.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" asked the manager, when they had seated themselves at his request.

"We have come to ask for your clemency for this unfortunate man," said Mr. Copplestone, pointing to Herman. "He is, as you know, shortly to be tried, and as he undoubtedly took the money, it will go hard with him if you press the case. In a moment of temptation he yielded to weakness, hoping to make good the deficiency later on, and at heart he is very far from being criminal. Mr. Staunton and I are prepared to refund the money, and to give Herman employment, whereby he may be able to earn enough to keep himself and his family, and repay our loan in the course of years. He has a very large family of young children, and if he is convicted, it will mean ruin to them as to him. Therefore, for the sake of the innocent ones, as well as his, I ask you to withdraw the case."

Mr. Whitegate listened in silence, with his eyes cast down, and he then said, "You ask me to compound a felony."

“No ; you must appear in Court now, but you can state that the money taken has been repaid, express your desire that Herman may be dealt with leniently, and ask for a conviction under the First Offenders Act, which will allow him to be at liberty, merely being liable to be called up for sentence should his subsequent conduct not prove satisfactory.”

“I do not take the view of the case that you do,” said the manager. “I consider it a bad one, for the man was in a position of trust, and did not take the money ‘in a moment of temptation,’ as you say, but embezzled it in small sums extending over a period of six months, as our books show. Moreover, he spent it in drink and gambling ; as we can prove, and as for his family—well, if a large family is to be pleaded as an excuse for crime, I fear there will be much crime and many evasions of justice.”

“I think I can prove,” said Staunton, when the manager had ceased speaking, “and I have brought Joyce to support me in this, for he was a witness to much of it, that Herman, who is not a morally strong man, was driven to crime by the action of the gentleman at your elbow. You ought to take this fact into consideration before you press the case.”

“What do you say to this ?” said Whitegate, turning to the sub-manager.

“That it is—is untrue—a libel, preposterous nonsense !” stammered Munks, who had turned an

unpleasant pasty color, "like a half-boiled plum duff," to use Staunton's elegant comparison when describing the scene to Ryan. "I never persecuted no one"—("two negatives are equivalent to an affirmative," thought Staunton)—"and personally I protest against these assertions (he meant aspersions) being made on my character. We have to uphold law and justice, and we have no alternity but to prosecute."

"That is my opinion also," said Whitegate; "and therefore, gentlemen, we must decline to fall in with your suggestions."

As Herman heard this decision, his jaw dropped, and he turned so pale that Staunton thought he was about to faint; but in a few moments a new feeling seemed to take possession of him, and, turning towards Munks, he regarded that individual with an expression that, singular to say, made the burly sub-manager visibly quail, and this before a man whom he had hitherto treated as a person of contemptible weakness.

"Our mission, then, has failed," said Mr. Coplestone, "and we must leave you to your own consciences—they must indeed be hard if this day's work does not affect them." And, with this parting salute, he stalked indignantly out, followed by his party, Herman, a picture of despair, bringing up the rear.

## CHAPTER XXX.

RYAN and Staunton successfully concluded the sale of their business, and the price realised was sufficient to give each of the partners a considerable sum in ready cash. The purchase money was paid over by the buyer of the paper, but he was not ready to enter into possession at once, so the sellers agreed to carry on the business for some time longer. They fulfilled their promise conscientiously, but there was an absence of the old eagerness, and the shadow of the forthcoming departure was over them all, more especially Edith, who went about her work in silence, and never sang now—a change that did not escape the notice of Ryan, who, more than once, wished that the synthesis of flour had never been accomplished. He was very despondent himself, as he informed Staunton, for he realised how rarely pleasant had been the brief partnership, during which he enjoyed the only companionship and sympathy with others that he had known in the



course of his troubled and lonely life. Staunton's bright and cheery nature had won on his gloomy and somewhat morose one, and association with Edith had refined and elevated his character. He knew himself to be a better man now than he had ever been before, and it was with a reluctance little short of dismay that he looked forward to striking out again along the lonely paths which he had formerly followed. As for Staunton, he, too, was genuinely sorry at the break-up of their pleasant connection, but *his* regrets were tempered by the reflection that he was about to enter on the life he had long wished for, and by another hope which buoyed him up even more than the first.

Miss Williams was nearly heart-broken when informed of the projected departure, and, though Staunton had heard it stated that Nature had neglected to provide Australian natives with tear glands, he now had evidence to the contrary, for Miss Williams wept freely, and was as low spirited as a common or garden English woman would have been under similar circumstances. She went about shrouded in gloom for several days, and at length remarked to her sister, "Jine, I can't bear to think of witing on strangers and giving them the dishes Mr. Ryan and Mr. Staunton were so fond of. I'd rather stab myself, or join the Salvition Army, or marry Hopkins." As the two first-named courses seemed rash and uncalled for, and as Hopkins was a well-to-do young farmer, Jane

advised the last, and Miss Williams, after further conversation, said, "She would think it over," but, at the same time, she was "not going to be any man's slave—ow! now," and she sought out her mother in order to discuss with her the advisability of selling the house, and making Hopkins happy, and also fat (if an Australian *can* be fattened,) for her cooking would certainly be a revelation to him.

The "kyiow," too, seemed to have a foreboding of the coming change, for she bellowed so dismally for several days, and eyed Staunton over the garden fence so pensively, that Miss Williams declared it was quite sad to hear and see her. "She knows you are going, Mr. Staunton, and that she won't have all this lucerne and green stuff when others come," and Miss Williams looked around the garden, now rich with verdure, as the fruit of many a hard hours' work on the part of Staunton.

"I believe she does know," he assented, "and it makes me quite sad to think of leaving her. By Jove!" he said, as the thought occurred to him, "why not take her with me? But perhaps you would not like to part with her, Miss Williams?"

"Ow! Mr. Staunton, I think we will be going ourselves."

"What?"

"Well, mother and I were talking over the matter yesterday, and we don't fancy taking on strangers after

Mr. Ryan and you leave, so we are thinking of selling the house. We are not badly off, and mother, who is getting old, will live quietly with my sister Jine."

"But what will you do?"

"Ow! Mr. Staunton!" Miss Williams blushed and hesitated. "I'm—I'm engaged."

"You! Never! Since when?"

"Last night."

"You apparently made up your mind suddenly, and are most terribly inconsistent. I thought you hated men?"

"Well, so I did till—till you and Mr. Ryan came here, and now I know that there are some good men."

"You make us feel proud, and I can solemnly assure you that there *are* some good men—or men that are not all bad. Accept my hearty congratulations. And now, tell me the name of the fortunate man."

"Mr. Hopkins."

"Hopkins! I congratulate you again. The finest fellow about Stanley, and a slashing cricketer. He bowled me for duck twice last year. He lives only four miles from the place I am trying to buy, and you will often be able to come over and have some milk from your own old 'kyiow,' which will remind you of olden times."

"I will often come and see you both."

"Whom, the 'kyiow' and me?"

"Ow! now; Mrs. Staunton and you."

“ But there is no Mrs. Staunton, and will not be.”

“ Ow ! yes, there will. I could nime the lidy.”

“ I wish I were as certain as you,” said Staunton, getting rather red in his turn. “ But if it is as you say, Miss Williams, we shall both be glad to see you, and for my part I will often visit your place, and perhaps help to rock the cradle——”

“ MR. STAUNTON !” And horrified, Miss Williams was gone.

This conversation had the effect of hardening Staunton’s resolution to test his fate in a certain quarter, and when he had completed the purchase of his farm, he determined to postpone the matter no longer. Having seen Mr. Copplestone safe in his office one afternoon, and Mrs. Copplestone set forth with her best bonnet on, which suggested a round of calls in Tatoora, he donned his newest tie and gloves, and in some trepidation, set forth on his mission.

“ Is Mr. Copplestone in ?” he asked with unconscious deceit and a winning smile, on arriving at the villa.

“ No, Mr. Staunton, he is aat,” responded the native who answered his knock, and replied to his smile with another, which signified plainly, “ It is not Mr. Copplestone that you want.”

“ Mrs. Copplestone, then ? ”

“ She is aat, too.”

“ How unfortunate,” muttered the truthful Staunton, and he made as if he would walk away, a movement

which did not in the least deceive the girl who waited for his next question, which came as if it were an afterthought, "Perhaps Miss Coplestone is in, then?"

"Ow! yes," with a still broader smile, and he was shown into the drawing-room, where sat his enslaver, who, to his surprise and dismay, gave him a most curt nod of recognition, as she said, "It is quite a surprise to see you, Mr. Staunton."

"Why, I was here a week ago," he said, with slight indignation.

"A week! It seems to me more than a fortnight—not that I keep any account of the time," she went on hastily. "It is a matter of no importance."

"Oh, isn't it?" said Staunton, crestfallen at once, and feeling inwardly that Miss Williams was "a little previous" in her forecast. What occurred during the next half-hour no one but the actors can say, but Staunton afterwards told Ryan that the interview was at first stormy, as the lady was indignant at his infrequent calls and neglect in not advising her of the momentous change that had taken place in his worldly affairs. When conveying this information to Ryan, this modern knight should no doubt have "spoken like a book," and said, "Wounded by my neglect, she reproached me bitterly for my want of feeling, and was so deeply incensed that she would have terminated our interview abruptly, but that I clasped and retained her hand, while humbly suing for pardon."

What he did say was :—" She was awfully riled because I had not called for a week or so, and gave me a terrible wiggling. She was really in a fearful scot, and would have cleared out then and there, only that I luckily grabbed her hand, and held on to it while I called myself names, and ate humble pie." The meaning was the same, though the language was not so choice.

The explanation must have been quite satisfactory, for when Mr. Copplestone returned some hours later, the pair were deep in a practical discussion concerning the arrangements of their new home. They were much exercised in mind by the question of a water tank, which Staunton thought should be so placed as to supply the upper story of the house, but to the thrifty mind of Miss Copplestone, this suggested a larger outlay than would be justified by results, and she therefore was in favor of an ordinary underground tank, with a pump to force the water up. They were so deep in their discussion that they did not notice the entrance of Mr. Copplestone till he said, " Now, what are you two discussing so earnestly ?—and so closely ? " he added, as he observed their position.

" Well, you see," said Staunton, still immersed in the tank, " I was explaining to Milly that, in the new house, it would be desirable to have a large tank, say of cast iron, so placed that it would supply water to the house as well as to the garden. By placing it on

brick walls, or a trellis work stand, it could be made to command the upper story, and so would obviate the labor of carrying water up-stairs. Besides, we could have a good bathroom, a shower, and all that, next to our room."

"But Frank doesn't consider the cost sufficiently, papa. You remember how expensive the iron tank you put up at the back of the house was. I think an underground reservoir would be far cheaper, and would keep the water cooler. You must consider the climate, Frank."

"I have considered it, Milly, but taking everything into account, I think the advantages of the iron tank outweigh all disadvantages. Don't you, Mr. Copplestone?"

"Before I give my opinion on this important question," said the old gentleman, drily, "will you kindly tell me why you are 'Millying' and 'Franking' each other, and also discussing tanks in new houses, as if you were both much interested therein?"

They looked at him in some confusion for a moment, and then both laughed. "I entirely forgot to tell you," said Staunton, "we are engaged."

"Indeed! Since when?"

"Since about 3 p.m."

"It is now 5, and already you have commenced disputing. My word, if you keep this up all your lives, you have a pleasant existence to look forward to."

"Now, papa, we were not disputing, but merely discussing the tank. *We* would not dispute about a subject like that."

"We would not be so cantankerous," muttered Staunton, but luckily this inopportune and villainous pun was not noticed.

"So, Milly, you are going to leave us, for I know it is useless for me to say anything when my Australian daughter makes up her mind to leave her old parents and go away for ever."

Despite an air of assumed lightness, the old man's voice shook a little as he spoke, and in a moment his daughter's arms were around him, and she said, "I am not going away, papa ; you have not heard the good news. Frank has taken Burton's farm, only seven miles from this, and mamma and you will be able to come over and see us often, and *we* will worry *you* nearly every week."

"That is splendid news, Milly," said Mr. Copplestone, much relieved to hear that he was not to lose his only child altogether. Staunton, my boy, there is no one in all Stanley I would rather give her to than you, even were you going away ; but, as it is, nothing could possibly have suited my selfish old ideas better. I am more fortunate in this than I ever expected to be. Bless you both, and if you are only half as happy as I wish you to be you will have very little trouble in life."

Mrs. Copplestone was equally pleased when she



heard of the engagement, for she had always liked Staunton, who, though not quite so perfect as she and her daughter believed him to be, was really a very fair specimen of humanity.

An evening of supreme felicitation followed, and Mr. Staunton arrived home at midnight in a condition of such happiness that Ryan, who had sat up on purpose to swear at him for letting Edith and himself in for extra work that evening, changed his intentions, and substituted congratulations for objurgations.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

HERMAN'S trial was about to take place, and Whitegate and Munks arranged to devote a portion of the previous day to working up the facts of the case, marking the wrongful entries in the cash book, and instructing the prosecuting lawyer on every point.

Wishing to read his correspondence before commencing this work, Whitegate proceeded to the office a little earlier than usual, and, opening the front door with his key, for the clerks had not yet arrived, passed into his private room—his holy of holies. For sixteen or seventeen years he had entered this room every work-day morning to find his chair drawn up to the desk, his letters laid on the blotting-pad, and all in good order. It was a shock then to him to find things otherwise this morning, for the room was in some disorder, the letters scattered about, and, seated in his chair, was—he could scarcely believe his eyes—Joyce, his discharged clerk. “What is the meaning of

this?" demanded Mr. Whitegate, in a calm fury. "You were dismissed some time ago, and, in any case, would have no business in my private room."

Joyce raised his eyes from a letter he had been reading, and said, in a cool tone, as if he had not heard the manager's remarks, "Ah! good morning Mr. Whitegate. Won't you take a seat?"

"I'll take a seat—my own, in which you are most audaciously sitting."

"I cannot let you have that, but you can take any other in the room."

Whitegate's immobile features paled a little—he began to suspect some move on the part of Ryan and Staunton—but he said "I shall not attempt to enter into dispute with you, but will give you in charge for entering these premises. Here, Munks!"

The assistant manager, who had been late at that agreeable resort, The Divan, on the previous night, and had overslept himself, now appeared, and glared in astonishment at the apparition of Joyce in the manager's chair.

"Send for a constable, Mr. Munks," said Whitegate. "This is a case of forcible entry."

Some of the clerks were now in the outer office, and one of these Munks despatched on the errand, and then returning to the inner office, continued to stare at Joyce in speechless amazement, while the latter sat nonchalantly back in his chair and calmly awaited the result.

The constable arrived in a minute or two, and to him Whitegate said, "I give this man in charge for entering these premises without authority. He is sitting now in my chair, at my desk, in my private office, where I found him when I entered a few minutes ago. He must have forced his way in, as the outer door was shut. Doubtless his object was to rob, and I surprised him by coming in half-an-hour earlier than usual."

"Do you know him?" asked the policeman, who seemed surprised by Joyce's good appearance and coolness.

"Yes. He is a discharged clerk of ours. His name is Joyce."

"The gentleman is in error as to my name," said the accused man quietly to the constable. "It is not Joyce."

"Ah! You came here under an assumed name, then?" exclaimed Whitegate.

"Yes."

"What is your real name?" demanded the policeman.

"HARRY SELLBRIDGE!!"

All Whitegate's impassivity did not enable him to withstand this shock unmoved, while under it Munks seemed in a fair way to drop, and undoubtedly would have dropped but for the convulsive grip of the desk he managed to retain.

"Yes, gentlemen, I am Harry Sellbridge, and not t o

beat about the bush, the game is up for you. Constable, will you kindly step to the front door and ask the gentlemen you see waiting there to come in? If you will then wait in the outer office you will be called if your services are required." The authority with which he spoke was sufficient for the policeman, who did as he was bidden, and Mr. Copplestone, Braefen-fell, Ryan, and Staunton entered.

"Be seated, gentlemen, please," said Sellbridge. "You, Mr. Copplestone, and you, Mr. Staunton, will please confirm a statement I have made to these men by telling them my name."

"Harry Sellbridge," they both replied.

"Very good. I have just told Messrs. Whitegate and Munks that so far as they are concerned the game they have been playing is over. It will, perhaps, be a satisfaction to them, and also clear up points which some of you do not understand, if the means by which their schemes were discovered, and ends thwarted, are explained, and I will, therefore, ask Mr. Ryan, the chief agent in bringing these things about, to fully explain matters from the first."

Whitegate sat perfectly silent with his eyes fixed on the floor, but Munks glared in fear and dismay at Ryan, as the latter commenced to speak.

"I had suspicions," he said, "that some conspiracy was afoot in connection with this firm soon after I joined it, for on several occasions while employed here

I was sounded by this man"—indicating Whitegate—"concerning my opinion of transactions which were, no matter how speciously described, straight out swindles, and nothing else. I am not given to mincing my words, and bluntly said what I thought, with the result that I heard no more of subjects of that kind. Some time afterwards I noticed that efforts were being made to get rid of me, and perceived that I was being closely watched by the sub-manager and other employees. Determining to give them no good excuse for dismissing me, I acted most carefully and guardedly, and for some time was able to hold my ground, but at length was dismissed on a most shadowy pretext. I then met Mr. Staunton, who had experienced somewhat similar treatment, and the manner in which our efforts to obtain employment in Stanley were frustrated, coupled with my knowledge of what had happened to other employees of this firm—notably those who had come with introductions from Mr. Sellbridge—led me to the conclusion that those in charge here were working some scheme which they did not wish anyone who knew the business, or had had relations with Sellbridge, to witness, and that they therefore made it impossible for any ex-employee to obtain work in Stanley. I had early formed the opinion that Whitegate was a man of daring ambition, concealed under an outwardly calm exterior, and an affectation of devotion to the interests of others, which had apparently im-

posed on old Mr. Sellbridge. Acting on this opinion, I took the trouble to follow his career as far back as I could trace if, but failed to discover an atom of disinterestedness in any of his actions, though these were such at times as would deceive people into the belief that he was a most kindly and unselfish man. He was charitable—as an advertisement ; polite and apparently kindly in manner—in order to impress people favorably ; but I was satisfied that no colder, more cruel, or selfish man was to be found anywhere, though no one was aware of this because he always acted calmly and dispassionately, and apparently with right on his side. I never before took much interest in other men—or myself for the matter of that—but this man excited my interest and I studied him. His seemed to be a case of ‘throwing back’ to such plotting types of humanity as Pope Alexander VI., his son, Cæsar Borgia, Machiavelli, and other characters of the Middle Ages, though, of course, his sphere of action was a tiny one compared to theirs. Still, I felt that, given similar circumstances and surroundings, this man was capable of all that they had done, for, though perhaps lacking their ability, he might have grown with his circumstances. He certainly possessed the necessary hardness of heart, or, to put it more scientifically, did *not* possess the higher moral feelings which control the mere selfish instincts. He was, in fact, utterly lacking in the moral qualities which should, in this age, have accompanied his

marked ability. To some, his schemes and plottings to become a *persona grata* in a small mercantile world may appear a trivial ambition, but to him it was not so, and certainly the step from office-boy of humble origin to civic magnate is a considerable one. On principle I set myself to defeat his ends, but I must also confess that I opposed him from a feeling of combativeness, due perhaps to my Celtic origin, and provoked by his attacks on myself. How, with Mr. Staunton's assistance, I held my ground and opposed him here you all know. What he and Muuks do not know, however, is that I opened communication with Mr. Sellbridge, told him of my suspicions that some scheme inimical to his interests was being developed here, and advised him to come out under an assumed name and investigate things for himself. This he did, and as 'Joyce' has been here for a year or more. He can tell you more about recent developments than I can.

"In all the practical steps I have taken, I have been aided by the advice of Mr. Braefenfell here. Mr. Copplestone supplied me with a letter of introduction to Mr. Sellbridge, and was cognisant of most of the means that were employed to bring Whitegate to account. And that is all I have to tell you."

When Ryan ceased speaking, Sellbridge asked the two men if they had anything to say, but they maintained a dogged silence, so he went on:—"When I received Mr. Ryan's letter, which was accompanied by



assurances from Mr. Copplestone and Mr. Staunton that I might rely implicitly on what the writer said, I at once realised that my presence here was required, and though I had just been married, and was about to set off on an extended tour through Europe, I at once cancelled all arrangements, and, with my wife, set sail for Adelaide under the name of Joyce.

“From Adelaide I travelled overland to Melbourne, where I deemed it best to leave my wife, as her presence here might have given rise to a suspicion of my identity. It was with the utmost unwillingness that she consented to even a temporary separation, and being the worst conspirator on earth, she constantly placed my plans in jeopardy, by making visits to Stanley, and sending letters and telegrams beseeching me, on every excuse she could think of, to come to Melbourne. I do not know how it was that her visits escaped observation for so long a time, but at length we were seen together, and the fact was made an excuse for my dismissal by Whitegate, as you know. To return to the occasion of my first arrival in Stanley, I went in the first instance to Messrs. Ryan and Staunton, and with them to Mr. Copplestone, who could scarcely believe that I was Harry Sellbridge, till I gave him abundant proofs of my identity. Before leaving England, I had written to Whitegate asking him to engage a Mr. Joyce as clerk, and I also bore a letter of introduction from myself, and was at once engaged.

In case my writing should betray me, I wrote while here a cramped and artificial hand, stating as an excuse for my bad caligraphy, that my thumb had been injured by an accident.

“No suspicion of my identity seems to have crossed the minds of these people, however, and in the twelve months or so that I have been here, I have neglected no opportunity of learning what schemes were afoot, and Mr. Copplestone being busy outside at the same time, making cautious inquiries amongst farmers and others, who had executed deeds of mortgage, and Mr. Braefenfell also assisting, we have accumulated a mass of evidence, which shows that these men and Thomson, of the Land Mortgage Company (Whitegate being the prime mover), have, for years past, been gradually transferring all the best loans and securities to the Mortgage Co. This so-called ‘Company’ is really owned by those three men, Whitegate having supplied all the capital, which has been taken from my business. Their intention was to practically convey over the whole business of this firm to the Mortgage Company, so that when I came out to take over the management, I should have found but a mere shell left, while they, having had a good start, would, without doubt, have worked up an enormous connection, and become the chief firm in Stanley. What Whitegate’s ultimate aims were I cannot say, but I am pretty sure that he only meant to use Munks and Thomson as tools, and in-

tended to throw them over whenever he felt he could do so safely. I agree with Mr. Ryan in thinking that the man was consumed with a boundless ambition. He was always careful to keep the law on his side in his earlier transactions, but of late he has been hurried, and now his technical guilt is undoubted, and we have the strongest proofs against him. I think I have now told you all I know myself."

When Sellbridge had concluded, Braefenfell whispered to Mr. Copplestone, who said, "I would ask the two persons accused if they wish to make any statement before being formally charged." Neither spoke, but Whitegate raised his eyes for a moment, and gazed on Ryan with a look in which hatred was oddly blended with a certain admiration. The constable was now called in, and Sellbridge was about to give the two men into custody, when Munks, who was deadly pale, bent over and whispered in his ear, whereupon he requested the policeman to withdraw with Whitegate into the outer office for a moment.

"Now," said Sellbridge, turning to Munks, "you say that we will never unravel this business, and will lose thousands of pounds unless you help us. Do you mean to turn evidence against the others?"

"Yes," said Munks, eagerly, "I'll give evidence against Whitegate. He has been working this crooked business for over ten years, and has done it so well that you won't get at the half of it without me."

"Well, we accept your assistance," said Sellbridge, looking with contempt on the cringing, treacherous scoundrel. You will not be charged, and are at liberty to go now ; but recollect that the slightest attempt to escape will be followed by your arrest."

Munks slunk out, and as the door closed behind his retreating figure, Ryan said, "I do not think you ought to have let that scoundrel go, Sellbridge ; he is quite as bad as the other, only less able. He has been convicted of swindling before, as I found when making inquiries about him. It would have been better to have prosecuted him, and used the evidence of Thomson."

"Perhaps I have done wrong ; but really the complexity of affairs in connection with this business tempted me to gain his assistance. I acted hastily in doing so, no doubt ; but for one thing I don't think he will do any more harm. He has been badly frightened this time."

"He has done enough in his time," remarked Staunton. "His persecution of that unfortunate wretch, Herman, merited heavy punishment, if nothing else did."

"I really forgot that for the moment, and had even forgotten Herman's case, which comes on to-morrow. There should be little difficulty in getting him off now, as I shall warn Munks not to appear, and will, after explaining matters, express my wish that the charge

may be withdrawn. But we had better go now, as Whitegate has to be charged."

Immediately afterwards such a procession left the office of Sellbridge & Co. as had never before gone thence, and the bewildered clerks asked one another blankly "What's up?" but received no more satisfactory answer than was furnished by the new junior, who advanced the opinion, couched in classical language, that "Someone had bloomin' well copped it."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

WHILE the foregoing events had been taking place, Herman, all unconscious of the fate which had overtaken his enemies, and probably effected his salvation, sat sullenly brooding over his wrongs, and calling down deep, if silent curses on Munks, the principal cause of his troubles. His was one of those small minds capable of dealing with only one idea, which, being much brooded over, may become a monomania. He drank steadily, but no quantity of spirits seemed to intoxicate, and he was, to all appearances, perfectly sober when, in the afternoon, he suddenly started up and leaving the house, walked into the open country. The sun shone brightly, the scent of flowers was in the air, fruit was forming on the trees, the distant bush loomed up boldly—a dark-green setting to a foreground of verdant grazing paddocks, cultivated fields, and fruit orchards planted in regular lines—but to him there was no beauty in Nature to-day, and his mind only contained

one thought, "I am to be tried to-morrow," which once in a while gave place to another, "Munks brought me to this." During the afternoon he walked along roads, lay in the paddocks, or sat on fences, but did not return home again, and so did not receive a message sent by Harry Sellbridge. When night approached he wandered into the town, and, drawn by some strange fascination, walked towards Sellbridge's. Perhaps through the window he might see Munks and the accountant going over the books, and making notes of the amount of his defalcations, in readiness for the trial. He slunk past but could see nothing; but returning that way again, after waiting at the corner of the street for a few minutes, he fancied he heard voices, and halted in the dark shadow of a wall. True enough, someone was speaking; and listening intently, he distinguished the sub-manager's tones, which seemed strangely indistinct, and devoid of their old rasping quality. "Very well, Sir," Herman heard him say, "as you wish it, I will move my things to-morrow, and will sleep here for the last time to-night. Of course, I have no communication with the rest of the house if the doors are locked, and, anyway, you have the key of the safe."

"Well, you can stay for this night only," said another voice, which, to the listener, seemed strangely like Joyce's; "but you must move to-morrow, without fail."

"I will, Sir. Good-night, Sir," said Munks, with singular servility, and then he passed out, almost touching Herman as he went. The latter was surprised by the words he had heard, but his brain was too confused to clearly grasp their meaning, and but one portion of the conversation remained in his memory—the words uttered by Munks, "I will sleep here for the last time to-night," and turning this over and over in his mind Herman walked slowly away.

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Ever since the day of Ryan's remarkable speech to Thomson and himself, in *The Moon* office, Munks' nerves had been more or less shaken, and though at various intervals a measure of confidence had been restored to him, yet, on the whole, his nervous tone had been lowered, and the last catastrophe, coming as it did with the suddenness of a thunderbolt, had brought him to a bad condition indeed. The moment he was released by Sellbridge in the morning he rushed off for spirits, and had been endeavoring to brace himself up with drams ever since, with the result that as he now shuffled along the dark street every passer-by became a policeman about to arrest, every shadow an enemy rising up to smite. So bad was his state indeed when he reached his favorite haunt, The Divan, that the landlord, with a prefatory condemnatory wish concerning his own organs of vision, exclaimed, "Mr. Munks, whatever is the matter? You're as white as



a sheet." Munks, without replying, passed into an inner room, where food was laid before him ; but after a half-hearted attempt to eat he found that he could not swallow a morsel of solid food, so fell to drinking again. Presently he dropped into an uneasy slumber, and, a victim to the most horrible dreams, lay on a sofa gasping, and convulsively starting every now and again for a couple of hours, when he awoke with a veritable shout of terror that brought the landlord in haste into the room.

"I was dreaming," explained Munks, and then went on, "I'm as bad as a man with the 'orrors, though I haven't been drinking to that extent."

"Lord no ! Mr. Munks, not by a long way. You're not well, that's what it is. Try a little brandy and soda, that's my advice."

Munks acted on this extremely wise advice to a man who had already taken perhaps seven times as much alcohol as was good for him, and having consumed several more nobblers, he set out for home. The night was close, oppressive, and overcast, but he took no notice of these facts as he rolled along unsteadily, steering by the gas lamps, and noticing that these doubled, quadrupled, and moved about into the night in a most extraordinary manner. The lamps were certainly mad or drunk, for he was alright, only shaken by that awful dream. What could have made him dream of Herman ? All thoughts of the man had

been driven out of his head by the events of the day, and why his sleeping brain should have been occupied with them he could not imagine.

The trial would take place to-morrow, and Herman's escape was, of course, certain, for he (Munks) would not dare to prosecute in opposition to Sellbridge. "It was a pity that Irish devil had been able to make his spring before Herman was put away. I'll never be safe while he's out," hiccoughed Munks, feeling in his pocket for his key. "No, by gum! for he hates me worse than poison, and what a look he gave me that day he was being taken off to the station (hic). Blesh my shoul, how dark this place is. I never noticed that before."

With great difficulty he found the keyhole, and letting himself in, closed the door and groped his way to the sitting-room. There was usually a glimmer of gas left burning, but to-night there was none. Muttering a curse on the caretaker, Munks, who was oppressed by the darkness, staggered hastily towards where he supposed the mantleshef to be, and reaching out for it touched something that felt like a cold human hand. His blood curdled round his heart at the feeling, and he started back in terror. Recovering himself in a moment, however, and reflecting that what he felt must have been an ornament on the mantleshef, but yet not venturing to reach out his hand again, he commenced to search in his pockets for

a vesta, and finding one at length essayed to strike it on his boot. He was too unsteady for this, however, and the match slipping from his nerveless fingers, fell to the floor. Uttering an oath, he dropped on his knees, and passing his hand over the carpet, found the match again, and stood upright. This time he rubbed it on his sleeve and it flashed up for an instant and then went out, but in that instant Munks believed that he saw the figure of a man standing near the fireplace.

Shaking with terror, he essayed to find the door, but was unable to do so ; so with trembling fingers he sought another vesta in his pocket, and struck this in the same manner as the first. It flared up bravely, illuminating the room sufficiently to enable all objects to be distinguished, and Munks, gazing fearfully in the direction of the fireplace, had his worst fears realised, for there undoubtedly stood a man—Herman—with his arms folded before him, the left supporting the right, and in the right hand a revolver. By the vesta's feeble light the man's eyes seemed to gleam phosphorescently, and his lips were parted in a ghastly smile, the teeth beneath showing plainly.

With eyes nearly starting out of his head, Munks surveyed this terrible visitant, once a flabby, terrified creature who trembled at his frown, now a desperate man, blind to all sense of fear, and animated by feelings of the most deadly hatred.

The match burned down to Munks' fingers, and with a yell of mingled pain and fear, he dropped it, and was making in the direction of the door, when he was seized ; the cold muzzle of the revolver was placed, first to his cheek, in the darkness, then to his temple, the words "Die, you dog !" were shouted in his ear—there was a flash, a report, and all was for ever darkness to Munks, the sub-manager.

\* \* \* \*

No one heard the shot, the caretaker and his wife slumbered heavily in a back room, and it was only when the woman entered in the morning, that the body was found. The police and a doctor were summoned, and the latter quickly stated his opinion that the man had shot himself, for the muzzle of the revolver (the weapon kept in a drawer in the room for the protection of the office, and now lying on the floor beside the body), had evidently been placed against the forehead, in which a large hole had been made, while part of the face was blackened by the explosion.

Wilkes, always on the look-out for news, soon heard of the tragedy, and told Staunton and Ryan of it when they arrived at the office.

"I am not surprised to hear of this suicide," said Ryan, "for Munks' nerves were shaken by years of excess ; and even if this were not so, he did not possess sufficient strength of mind to bear a part in such deep laid schemes as those of Whitegate's without suffering

keenly. If he had not shot himself he would have become a hopeless inebriate."

"I cannot grieve for him," said Staunton, "and for Herman, this will mean safety, for there will be no one to appear against him now. And that reminds me—I hope the fellow will turn up at the Court all right."

"Perhaps you had better go and look after him," said Ryan. "He has been in such a stupid condition lately that he may forget all about the trial."

On arrival at "The Howleries," Staunton found Mrs. Herman leaning over the garden gate, and looking up and down the road. "Where is your husband?" he demanded.

"Out somewhere," she replied; "he has not been home since yesterday afternoon." Her lethargic and listless manner, though perhaps natural enough, was irritating to Staunton at a moment like this, and he hurried off to search for Herman without in the least knowing where to commence. He had only arrived at the end of the street, however, when he saw a figure approaching, with a slow, hesitating step, and to his joy recognised the missing man.

"Why, Herman," he exclaimed, seizing the dishevelled wanderer by the arm, "where have you been?"

"Out in the wild bush—under the gums," replied Herman, in a sort of chaunt.

Staunton stared. "In the bush all night!" he said. "Where did you sleep?"

"On a fern bed—in the ti-tree scrub," answered Herman, in the same sing-song tone.

"The man is deranged," Staunton said ; and then seeing that no time was to be lost, he hurried the poor man off to "The Howleries," where, with Mrs. Herman's assistance, he soon made him presentable, and then waited while he partook of a slice of toast and cup of strong tea. He then led him away to the Court, Herman making no opposition whatever, and suffering himself to be taken anywhere that Staunton wished. He acted like a man in a dream all day, evincing no fear when his case was called on, and no pleasure when after lengthy explanations from Harry Sellbridge, Staunton, and Mr. Copplestone, he was convicted under the First Offenders Act—sentence being deferred during good behaviour—and allowed to depart.

That night he was seized with an illness, believed to be cerebral congestion ; and when, after a long long period passed in darkness at the Stanley Hospital, he recovered his bodily strength, his mind was a blank, and he remembered nothing that had occurred from the time he was a boy of thirteen, though all matters relating to his early life, he, strange to say, remembered perfectly. By the time of his recovery, the strange events which happened at Sellbridge's had lost their novelty, and were ceasing to excite interest, and Sellbridge, seeing that Herman had no recollection of the painful events, decided to keep him there instead

of sending him away, as had been at first intended. After consultation with a doctor, he was put to entirely new work, namely, that of attending to the large garden which Sellbridge had commenced to cultivate. With surprising quickness Herman picked up a knowledge of his new duties, and became in time quite sufficiently expert therein. A house was built for him about half-a-mile from the villa, and it has been found in practice that unless the wind is blowing from that quarter of the compass, no inconvenient volume of sound from the new "Howleries" reaches the ears of the Sellbridges. Probably the young Hermans do not yell so much as formerly, as some of them have advanced rather beyond the age of excessive vocalisation; and, moreover, having a larger space to play in, they do not come into personal collision so frequently, as was the case in the small garden and narrow passages of their old abode.

No more branches grew on the Herman family tree, and the perambulator having been put away for good and all—it is hoped—Mrs. Herman has time for such relaxation and amusement as may be enjoyed by a lady who has nine young children to look after.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE death of Munks removed the only person who was even fairly cognisant of Whitegate's intricate schemes, and the unravelling of these proved extremely difficult. Sellbridge himself was able to accomplish but little, and found it necessary to engage Staunton and another accountant to assist him. The former knew a good deal of the system under which Whitegate conducted business, and soon proved such a valuable aid that Sellbridge voluntarily increased his remuneration to a handsome figure. With an infinity of labor the two accountants succeeded in tracing back to their commencement a number of the transactions, but the others could not be followed at all, and large sums had to be written off as lost, and Staunton and his colleague arrived at the conclusion that if Whitegate had had time to carry out his schemes on the slow and careful plan originally conceived by him, and followed in the earlier operations, it would have been



well nigh impossible to have proved any fraudulent intent on his part, even were his honesty suspected at all.

It was the hastening of his action during the last twelve months or so which betrayed the whole scheme. Possession was immediately taken of the Land Mortgage Company's books and assets, and on all these latter being transferred back to Sellbridge's—whence every pound's worth of them had originally been derived—Harry Sellbridge found himself in possession of a business shrunk to almost half of what its paper dimensions had been under Whitegate's management. Under the circumstances, he was, however, glad to have anything left; and in gratitude to Ryan, whom he looked upon as the prime agent in the preservation of his business, he proffered that gentleman a magnificent reward. This Ryan declined, saying he deserved no credit for what he had done, but Sellbridge paid a sum of one thousand pounds into his account, and would take no denial.

"Spend the money how you please," he wrote to Ryan, "but don't ask me to forego the pleasure of making you what is, after all, an inadequate acknowledgement for your past services to me." And so Ryan was forced into acceptance.

Sellbridge determined to execute no further loans, and to reduce the interest on those in existence to the lowest minimum rate, at the same time requesting the

borrowers to gradually pay off the principal as they conveniently could.

His income fell off very much at first, as a result of his action, but he developed the mercantile side of the business with wonderful energy, and on a new and unique principle of trade—that of telling nothing but the truth concerning, and charging only a fair profit on, every article sold. And as people began to understand his principles, they commenced to flock to Sellbridge's for agricultural implements, seed, manures, and the thousand and one things sold by the firm, and the business was soon as prosperous as ever, while Sellbridge himself proved a great acquisition to Stanley in general, and the cricketing and athletic section in particular.

Whitegate was tried, convicted on the clearest evidence, and sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude. His private investments were not very large, most of his schemes having centred in the Land Mortgage Co. ; but the house and grounds at 'Tatoora were his absolute property, and these Mrs. Whitegate was allowed to retain. She almost immediately sold them, and with the handsome sum realised, withdrew in great content to Melbourne. Possessing a full share of indifference, and having her own fortune made secure, she did not in the least trouble herself about Whitegate—whose house indeed she had married, not himself. Her ambitions were of a mild and negative type, being limited

to attiring herself sumptuously, and perpetually taking the children—impossibly dressed in sky blue or bright red—"down the Rye." She is worth one hundred pounds a year to Cutter and Stitch, and at least fifty pounds to the owners of *The Ozone*. She is to be seen on "The Block" in Collins-street every day, but has not gone into the country recently, for there are "kyiows" in the country ; and, on a never-to-be-forgotten occasion, one of these animals, sorely perturbed and enraged by the appearance, within its field of vision, of a small boy in a sanguinary-looking suit, lowered its head, and bellowing fiercely, pursued the boy, who fled towards the fence, bellowing also. The "kyiow" was the speedier of the two, however, and catching up to her victim, she tossed him into a slimy ditch, whence he emerged with his color changed to green—unhurt, but terribly frightened. From that day on Mrs. Whitegate shuddered at the mention of the country, and to her it was a matter of continuous wonder why anyone at all lived outside the city. Collins, Bourke, Swanston, and Elizabeth Streets were, to her, everything that the heart of man or woman could desire, and if anyone had ventured to suggest that the soil of those streets was not well adapted for growing wheat or fruit, she would simply have stared and thought, "How silly ! Who wants wheat ? And you can buy plenty of fruit in the shops."

Mr. Forrester "let his weight go too much on one

side of the rail," as Ryan put it, in connection with Whitegate's affairs, and when Harry Sellbridge withdrew his account from the Central Bank, even the wily rail-sitter himself knew that his hour had come. On the day of the Whitegate *expose*, he was in the outer office when the gentleman he knew as "Joyce" walked in.

"Ah, so you are still here?" said Mr. Forrester. "I thought you would have taken my advice and gone to Melbourne. You would have done much more wisely by so doing, for there is nothing worth having here; and personally, I can give you no assistance, as I said before."

"I did not want to see you about that, Mr. Forrester. Can you spare me a few minutes' private conversation?"

"I really cannot. I am very busy just now. Good day, Mr. Joyce. Bring the ledger into my private room, Mr. Dawson."

"Excuse me, Mr. Forrester," said Joyce, "my business is important, and I must see you privately, or state it here."

"I told you I cannot see you. Come, Mr. Dawson!" said Mr. Forrester, impatiently.

"Very well, then," said the other, becoming irritated. "I must tell you, in the presence of all your clerks, that I have come to close the account of Sellbridge & Co. with this bank."

“What do you mean ? ”

“Just what I say. My name is Harry Sellbridge, and the account is closed as from this hour.”

A pin might have been heard to fall in the office after this amazing statement had been made, and though Mr. Forrester abased himself before Sellbridge, and metaphorically crawled in the dust at his feet, he well knew himself that all his tactics were useless, and that he had at last tumbled from his rail.

The withdrawal of their largest Stanley account caused the directors to make an inquiry into the affairs of that branch, when they found that large sums had been lent to the Land Mortgage Co. and Whitegate personally, without sufficient security. Under these circumstances they did not wish to retain Mr. Forrester's services any longer, and that gentleman found himself in a position to devote the whole of his time to horticulture. He had managed to save sufficient to secure a small independence, but on his greatly reduced income, he could not see his way to keep his energetic son any longer, and in consequence Mr. Jack had perforce to take his departure from the paternal roof.

Before leaving for Western Australia, he called on Staunton, and gave himself the pleasure of uttering a few complimentary and commendatory remarks concerning his parent. “I'm glad to go, after all,” he said, “for ‘the old man,’ with no business to go to, and

messing about that blessed garden all day, and every day, is a bit too much to put up with. He has gone off his head about roses now, and talks about 'making a serious attempt to produce scent.' He found out that people in France make a living out of an acre or two of roses, and as he has three acres that he can plant, he already sees his way to earn as much as when he was at the Bank. Up to date he has three sickly plants growing, and I reckon it will be about thirty-five years before his three acres are bearing ; but bless you, time is nothing to him, and he is already talking of selling the 'kyiow' and the horse, so that he may be able to break up the grazing paddock for roses. When he is in the height of his glory I always ask some question that makes him wild ; and the other day, when he was 'skiting' about what he'd make out of the roses, I chipped in and said, 'What will you do with them when you grow them ?'

" 'Do,' he said, 'what a silly question ! Make scent from them, of course.'

" 'How ?'

" 'Why, in the usual manner.'

" 'Oh, then you understand scent-making ?'

" 'I—hem—I have some knowledge of the process ; but what is the use of talking about anything practical with you ? *Your* knowledge is confined to billiards and racing, at which you lose *my* money !'

" Nice way to talk to his only son, wasn't it ? But

it was nothing to the way he rounded on me a couple of days ago, when he told me I was a born loafer and only fit to be a 'sundowner.' That riled me a bit, you know, though I don't mind him as a rule, and I said I would be a better man than he was when I had had his experience.

" 'My experience !' he yelled, like a blackfellow, 'you'll never have my experience, for deuce a thing have you ever done in all your life but extract money from me by every dodge known to man.' He spluttered and stammered so, I thought he'd have a fit, and then he ordered me out of the house ; but I wouldn't go till I got twenty-five pounds out of him, and then I cleared."

Staunton laughed—and groaned—at this recital, and said, "Well, I hope you will be successful, and come back with some cash, settle down, marry, and all the rest of it."

"Well, I'm engaged, as you know, to Alice Davis ; but goodness knows about settling down."

"You will come and see your sisters sometimes, anyway ?"

"Oh, I don't know ; besides, they may not be here. Emily and Mary have had a row with 'the old man,' too. He has been savage ever since he lost his billet, and he went on to them so one day that they both left, and went back to Townsend's house."

"Really ?" said Staunton, who knew that Town-

send and his wife had definitely separated after some six or seven months of married life, and that Mrs. Townsend had been latterly living at her father's house.

"Oh, yes ; but Townsend isn't there. He wrote to Emily, telling her that she might have the house ; but he has gone away to New South Wales, and I believe intends to return to England shortly."

"Your father and mother, then, have the house to themselves," he remarked, aloud.

"Oh, yes ; they manage to pull along together. She never listens to a word he says, and he talks *at* her all day, and so they get on somehow."

"Holy matrimony," thought Staunton, but said nothing, and shortly afterwards his visitor departed.

While still engaged at Sellbridge's, Staunton set about building a comfortable little brick house on a hill, which commanded a most extensive view, not alone of his own land, but of all the country round. Every day that he could spare he went to see how the building was progressing, and once or twice drove over with Miss Copplestone, and delighted her by unfolding his ambitious agricultural schemes. They would go in for vines, and have grapes, raisins, and wine of their own. Then they would try poultry farming (with chickens at two and sixpence in the Melbourne markets, and eggs at two shillings per dozen, this simply must pay), and they would also keep a pig or



two. Miss Copplestone rather demurred to the last—"pigs are such dirty things"—but when he assured her that they would be kept "miles" away from the house, and promised that she should never be asked to go near them, she accepted the pigs with a charming complacency, which he rewarded with three kisses and a gentle pinch of her rosy ear. This digression over, they returned to agriculture, and in the course of an hour had determined to try seventeen distinct styles of farming, and arranged to stock their hundred acres with most of the known herbivorous animals, two of the carnivora (a dog and a cat), and numberless feathered creatures. By the time Staunton had completed his labors at Sellbridge's the new house was completed, and Mr. and Mrs. Copplestone had to suffer the loss of their daughter's company, the pain of which was, however, greatly mitigated by the knowledge that she was thoroughly happy, and was to reside so near them that they could see her very often. Mr. Copplestone immediately prepared for the altered conditions of life by purchasing a stout cob, on which to ride over to Staunton's farm, where the prospect of making a new garden amidst wild surroundings was one that he anticipated much enjoyment from.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

As the time approached when the paper would be finally taken over by the new proprietor, Ryan's despondency grew deeper. This was particularly the case in the early morning and other periods, when his organisation was at its weakest, and his imperfectly-nourished brain seemed unequal to coping with the gloomy thoughts which oppressed it, and at such seasons he found it difficult to refrain from writing to Laughton to tell him that the English trip would have to be deferred, or cancelled altogether, so far as he (Ryan) was concerned. These thoughts were banished the moment mental energy returned, but he was unable to shake himself entirely free from depression at any time. In all his life he had never known much happiness, and his somewhat morose and retiring disposition had prevented him from making friends. Morally strong, and possessing a clear intellect, he had felt himself his own best support, and had, therefore,

held aloof. To others he could not go for sympathy or advice, and while many could lean on him (were they so disposed), he could find none on whom he could lean; so, silent, reserved, and self-contained, he had gone on his way, too intellectual to be a cynic, too pessimistic to enjoy life. Had he been thrown amongst the brain-workers of the world he would, no doubt, have found many in sympathy with him; but such had not been his lot, and amidst wealth-seekers and commercial people generally, he was indeed lost. His old manners and ideas had been greatly modified by association with Staunton and Edith, while the constant attrition of intense practical work—to say nothing of the cobweb-dispelling effects of a tough struggle with strong opponents—had almost completely banished his gloom, and he had found himself every day growing more cheerful. Small wonder then that he dreaded the loss of all these good influences, and looked forward to his new life with something like fear.

When the last day at the old office came he had almost completed his arrangements for departure, and had even sent on some of his baggage to Melbourne, whence Laughton had already shipped away a ton of his synthetically-prepared flour, carefully packed in zinc-lined cases. Staunton, who was working at Sellbridge's, removed his private papers and effects in the morning; but Ryan and Edith, busy on that day's paper, left theirs till all work was completed and the

paper had been printed, when they commenced to gather together books, papers, and other personal effects. They worked in silence, immersed in their own thoughts, and Ryan, at all events, feeling much depressed. Presently, as the thought that this was the very last hour of a most pleasant companionship took possession of his mind, something very like the "lump of grief," with which he was very familiar in his boyhood's days, rose in his throat. Gulping it down with an effort, he tied up his last parcel, and then turned to look round the office for the last time. His companion had sunk into a chair, pale and apparently fatigued, and was resting her head on her hand.

"So this is the last we shall see of the poor old *Moon Office*," said Ryan, speaking with an effort.

"Yes," said Edith, sadly.

"You are grieved to be leaving it?"

"Very."

"So am I. Ours was a happy partnership. Business does not bring out the best attributes of human nature, and yet I do not think Staunton, you, or I ever had anything approaching to a serious disagreement."

"No, not once."

"Staunton was a capital fellow to work with, always good natured and willing, and a perfect natural storehouse of jollity."

"He—he was very nice," she said, in a choking voice,

“ And Wilkes and Brady, too,” he went on, hastily. “ No better-hearted men ever lived, despite their weakness for alcohol, from which I believe you have entirely won them, Edith. I never saw such an improvement in any men, and Bardlow, the incoming proprietor, who is a teetotaller, has promised to look after them carefully, and if necessary, endeavor to get some of the younger women, who have taken up your ideas, to keep a sisterly eye on Wilkes and Brady. Feminine influence of the right kind will do more to keep those two fellows on the straight path than all the lectures delivered by all the male temperance advocates on earth. By the way, Bardlow has taken a great interest in you, Edith. He thinks you a wonderful woman, and says that, from what he has heard, he believes you wield a greater power for good than anyone he has met in Australia. You would bring about a social revolution if you were to remain here, according to him—show women the real responsibility of their position, and rouse them from their present state of indifference, selfish content, or frivolity. He asked me if I could not induce you to stay on as his partner, and was very anxious that you should meet his wife, an English woman, who holds very similar views to yours. Don’t you think it would be well to stay on ? ”

She shook her head and replied, “ No, I don’t feel equal to working with strangers just now. I should prefer to go away somewhere for a change.”

Her tone had such an element of despondency in it that he exclaimed, "Edith, you are very much grieved by this termination of our pleasant partnership. It was selfish of me not to have seen before how much it wounded you. Women feel such things much more keenly than men."

"I—I am grieved a little. I am not very well, I think, but I will be all right after a change."

"Hang Laughton and his discovery!" muttered Ryan, for the twentieth time in the last week, and with the troublesome lump rising in his throat again.

"I am very sorry," he said, "and now wish that I had not forced this dissolution on Staunton and you, by my determination to go to England with Matthew."

"I should not have consented to your remaining," she said, "for I agreed with all your remarks that day in Melbourne, and still feel that it is right for you to go, in interests beside which those of mine should not be considered."

Silence ensued, and Ryan, his rugged features working, his fingers twitching nervously, endeavored to brace himself for the final effort of saying good-bye; but failing, continued the conversation in tones scarcely raised above a whisper. "When shall we meet again?" he said.

"I do not know," she answered, in almost equally low tones.

"What do you intend to do next?"

"I have made no plans yet, but should like to go away for a while, perhaps to Melbourne or Sydney. After that I may return and stay for a time with the Stauntons. Miss Copplestone came to see me to-day, and pressed me strongly to visit them when they settle in their new house."

"And after that?"

"I have not thought of anything further."

Silence again followed; and then Ryan, thinking "I must get it over," said, "It is growing late, and I suppose we must go. I shall be leaving early in the morning, so shall not see you again. Good-bye!"

He held out his hand. She rose and took it. "Good-bye!" she gasped, while her throat moved convulsively.

With a distinct physical pain at his heart he turned to go, and had almost reached the door, when, giving a last backward look, he saw that she was sobbing with a noiseless intensity that shook her frame from head to foot. He darted back on the instant, his face working, his hands clenched. "Edith!" he cried, "Edith, I cannot go!"

"Do go," she managed to articulate.

"No, no, I can't! I have struggled against my feelings till I could have cried out in pain, but they have conquered me. I cannot leave you, Edith. I love you."

Looking up at these words, she uttered the exclamation

tion "Oh!" and would have fallen to the floor, only that he caught her in his eager arms, and pressing her to his breast, showered kisses on her face and hair, while his heart throbbed furiously with mingled pain and delight. She suffered his embrace, indeed returned it for a moment; but then, recovering herself, she withdrew from his arms and said, "Robert, you should have gone."

"Did you wish me to go?"

"God knows, no—but——"

"What?"

"We can never be anything to each other, and have merely augmented the pain of parting by this. Oh! you should have kept silence."

"Heaven knows I tried to hard enough. But why must it end here?"

"I had thought to live out my life alone, believing I could do more for others in that way, and—and—besides, you do not know all about me."

"I never sought to know anything, but the information was thrust upon me that you left here with a man whom you subsequently married and then were separated from. It was because of this marriage I did not speak. I believed that you liked me, but determined that no act or word of mine should lead you to do anything which afterwards you might regret, or which might occasion you trouble. The struggle was a severe one, but I triumphed over my feelings, and



was congratulating myself on my strength of mind, when, at the crucial moment, it gave way, and now, after all my struggling, I stand beaten—but rather glad that I am beaten,” he muttered to himself in conclusion.

“You have been misinformed about me,” she said. “I was never married. I left here years ago with Ernest Laughton, Matthew’s brother, who spent some time on a station in the district. He was different to the young men I had previously met, and I came to love him and believe in him as a noble character—which he was very far from being, I subsequently found. I will say for him that at an early stage of our acquaintance he told me that he was already married to a woman much older than himself (the match having been arranged by relatives), but from whom he had soon separated for good.

“It may possibly seem singular to you, but almost from the time I first began to think for myself I came to the conclusion that the ceremonial marriage, so dear to the heart of the average woman, and so vitally important to the clerical mind, is really of no importance to persons who know their own minds, are independent, and who, above all things, love one another. Love! That is the crucial matter, for without love no union is justifiable, even if it be supported by the prayers and blessings of all the Churches in Christendom. Another matter that I early saw clearly was the injustice of the marriage system, pertaining in

this and all other countries, except some of the States of America, for the woman loses her name and practically her individuality; and if the union prove an unsuccessful one much misery is caused by the difficulty of, and social disabilities attendant on, dissolving it. The popular idea in British communities is that if man and wife disagree, one or both of them must be 'bad,' which is a perfectly monstrous presumption, as both may be possessed of all the virtues, yet be unable to live happily together. Thinking thus, and believing first in the right of the individual to be himself or herself for eternity, I never leaned towards marriage, and as I looked upon Ernest Laughton as really unmarried, despite the legal tie, I had no hesitation in throwing in my lot with his. I afterwards had reason to congratulate myself on not having bound myself to him in the conventional way, for when we had been two years together, and residing then in London, I began to find that we suited each other but ill. He never read—I was studious. His idea of happiness was continually mingling with the crowd—I preferred seclusion. The Oxford, Alhambra, or Empire Music Halls, with rides in the Row, dinners at Frascati's or the Criterion, etc., etc., constituted the pleasures of London life for him; visits to South Kensington Museum, The National Gallery, The Academy or British Museum, walks in Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park, drives about the great city on the top of

an omnibus, and a secluded life in a quiet flat were what I liked. Every day saw us drift further apart, and at length when he came in for a large sum of money on the death of his father, and found me more than even a bar to his favorite amusements, he commenced to treat me with such heartlessness that Matthew expostulated with him on one occasion, and a violent quarrel followed, which parted the brothers for ever. Shortly after this, his legal wife having died, he surprised me by offering to marry me, but I refused. He became more violent than ever after this, and I left him for good, and for two years maintained myself in London by literary work. At the end of that time, the lady with whom I shared a flat in Bury-street died and left me all she possessed, and then feeling lonely in London, and being in ill-health, I came out here. Love had dealt with me but unkindly, and I hoped to have done with it for ever, and—and Robert, I wish you had had strength to go without saying anything."

Ryan's face had been clearing as she spoke, and now with a smile he said, "Sweetheart, who am I that I should question or find fault with you in any way? Come to me, my own." With a glad cry she sprang to his eager clasp, and he strained her to his breast.

"You were very downcast at the thought of my departure, were you not?" he asked.

"Very; despairing, indeed."

"Yet you made a brave fight to conceal your sorrow."

"I did my best, but felt that my success was small."

"My case was similar ; my heart has been like lead for weeks past. The thought of parting, and of that lonely voyage to England, were bitterness indeed, though my reason told me that our old relations could not go on for ever, and that sooner or later I should have to fly or speak. Thank Heaven, I have spoken. And now the voyage will be a pleasant one indeed. Matthew will be delighted to hear of this, for he has the highest possible opinion of you. But so has everyone who really knows you."

"Well, I have secured *one* strong ally, at all events," and she pressed his arm tenderly.

"Yes, dear, you can rely on my support, such as it is ; but I am afraid that far from lending aid I shall frequently require it."

"You shall have what I can give," she said, "and together we will work out our lives."

"Yes ; and together be to the last," and he kissed her fondly again.

"I do not seem to recognise myself," he remarked a little later, pausing on the threshold, "because, for the first time in my life, I am absolutely and entirely happy."

"It is so with me," she said.

The door of *The Moon Office* closed behind them for

the last time, and "heart to heart and hand to hand" they went joyfully forth to the New Life.

THE END.

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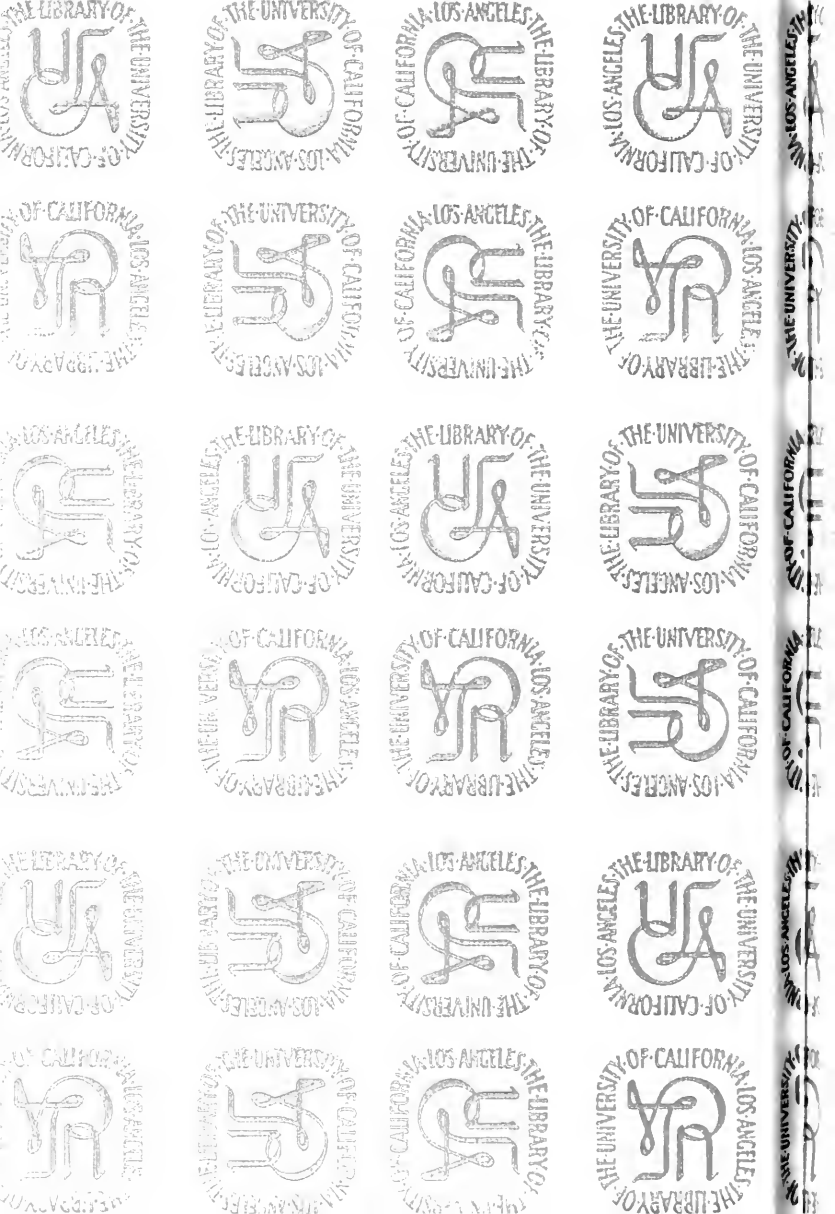
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